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# **The lived experience of teaching Shakespeare**

**by**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts Education

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## ***Abstract***

This thesis explores the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare within English in England's secondary schools. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as methodology it examines teaching practices in the Shakespeare classroom in terms of influences and variations. Both literature and data suggest three core categories of influence are at play: socio-political, professional and personal contexts. Throughout this research I argue that it is only through analysing all three, and the complex inter-relationships between them, that we can begin to understand practice and variations in that practice. Through between one and three semi-structured interviews with nine English teachers, followed by thematic data analysis, I attempted to identify influences that were significant, whether shared or different. Furthermore, I considered both presence and *absence* of experience, since this emerged within the data as a key consideration. I ultimately concluded that whilst socio-political contexts, through curriculum and assessment, undoubtedly impact on the experience of Shakespeare, they do not of themselves explain the variations in practice reported within the literature and my data. The teaching of Shakespeare is deeply influenced by three further characteristics. Firstly, local cultures appear to have a significant impact on Shakespeare, both in terms of cultural attitudes towards education, and the nature of school cultures and leadership. Secondly, the importance of experiences of high quality training may come as no surprise; however, what is noteworthy is the extent to which absence has such a detrimental effect on experiences of teaching Shakespeare, as illustrated within the data. Finally, and perhaps most noteworthy, highly individualised, frequently random, often (inevitably) subjective personal identities, philosophies and life histories significantly influence how English teachers experience the teaching of Shakespeare. Collectively, the presence or absence of supportive cultures, training and personal experiences and preferences, appear to account for most variations in practice, prompting important considerations for individual teachers, school leaders, training providers and policy makers.

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## ***Declaration***

The work in this thesis was developed and conducted by the author between 2012 and 2017. I declare that, apart from work whose authors are explicitly acknowledged, this thesis and the materials contained in it represent original work undertaken solely by the author. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## ***1.1 The lived experience of teaching Shakespeare***

The overarching aim of this thesis was to deepen awareness and understanding of teaching practices in the Shakespeare classroom, where Shakespeare's plays have long been a feature of England's secondary schools. A key purpose was to explore variations in practice, and awareness and use of specific approaches and pedagogies. For reasons outlined below, I ultimately chose to focus on the lived experiences of English teachers mandated to teach Shakespeare. My argument, developed through this study, is that this experience is best understood from analysis of the complex interplay of socio-political<sup>1</sup>, professional and personal contexts that shape it. Whilst the teaching of Shakespeare straddles two extensive academic fields of Shakespearean studies and education, there has been 'lukewarm or limited academic engagement in Shakespeare in schools' (Olive, 2015:88). Furthermore, few studies on the teaching of Shakespeare focus on *all three* contexts, identified through this study as being individually, and collectively, deeply influential. My research is therefore intended to address some of these gaps within the existing literature.

In England, the geographical focus of my study, the socio-political context is one in which Shakespeare has long been 'reinforced and transmitted by the educational system' becoming 'a figure we immediately recognise...' (Hawkes, 1990: Paragraph 9). Shakespeare's national (and indeed international) reputation and status is well-documented (Lanier, 2007). Yet this status is complex (Eaglestone, 2009), contradictory (Rumbold, 2010) and controversial (Bottoms, 2013). Some claim that the Shakespeare who appealed to the masses for over

1 I have used the term 'socio-political' as an umbrella heading that embraces the education context of national policies, alongside cultural contexts.

three hundred years (Coles, 2013a) has been replaced by a Shakespeare associated with an elitist agenda (Olive, 2013), part of a project of cultural imperialism (Said, 1993) whereby Shakespeare has become a source of alienation and marginalisation (Shah, 2013). Others have gone further, suggesting an overtly political appropriation of Shakespeare within England's education system (Sinfield, 1994), perhaps through 'a piece of sustained hype, the manipulation of a myth by those with a personal stake in its perpetuation...' (Proudfoot *et al.*, 2014:1). Yet others have rejected the notion of Shakespeare as elitist or exclusionary, talking instead of his 'cross-cultural appeal ... Shakespeare has also belonged to a variety of 'low' traditions ... [and] has appealed to the artisan and the colonized as well as the gentleman and the government minister' (Bate, 1997:318).

There are clear overlaps between the socio-political and professional contexts, particularly around deeply divisive arguments about the purpose of education, as well as pedagogy. Though such arguments affect the teaching of any subject, their influence on the teaching of Shakespeare appears particularly profound. Interestingly, some have suggested that debates about Shakespeare's 'place in the school curriculum' which 'includes both content and teaching methodology ... perhaps mirrors the debate about education in general' (Gilmour, 1994:8). Lack of consensus on the purpose of education is well documented in the literature (Mortimore, 2014:116), whilst some focus on lack of defined purpose within the specific arena of English as a subject (Davison & Dowson, 2009). Others describe purpose falling broadly between two oppositional camps: the first prioritises students acquiring a 'body of *knowledge*', with a consequent 'emphasis on curriculum over pedagogy and on content over process'; the second focuses on helping students to 'develop learning *skills*' (Moore, 2012:39; my italics). Moore concluded that the different purposes 'suggest' different pedagogies. So-called transmissive approaches, used to 'pass on information' sit more comfortably with

the first purpose, whilst ‘a more student-centred (“progressive” or “constructivist”) approach ... [is] suited to an educational purpose aimed at encouraging independence of thought’ (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, transmissive methods are frequently described as ‘traditional’ (Harris, 1998), or as ‘direct instruction’ (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011), with progressive or similar approaches often simply referred to as ‘alternative’ (for example, Hattie & Yates, 2014).

The divisions are further highlighted through terminology and descriptions based on binaries. Some suggest that the term ‘progressive’ ‘is both a vacuous and mischievous notion’ as it conflates so many ‘diverse philosophical viewpoints’ (Bangs *et al.*, 2011:70). Yet the terms ‘traditional’ or ‘transmissive’ appear equally unsatisfactory; all these terms have become value-laden, often used with zeal or pejoratively as evidenced in speeches made by Michael Gove, Education Secretary from 2010 to 2014, during which time my initial research and all interviews took place (2013a, 2013b). Indeed a puzzling feature of the education landscape is that so much is characterised in terms not merely of binaries but of deep polarisations. Thus arguments focus on traditional *versus* progressive, knowledge *versus* skills, rather than knowledge *and* skills. They appear in debates about the teaching of Shakespeare (for example McLuskie, 2009; Olive, 2015), where arguments about transmissive versus progressive pedagogies are often linked to further proposed binaries between what are termed literary and active/rehearsal-based approaches, examined more fully below. These simple binaries are critiqued by many – Alexander, for example, described them as ‘lazy’ (2008:73). Egan went further, citing the work of German philosopher Nietzsche (1844-1900) as a means of highlighting what he perceived as the deeply problematic nature of such thinking. Nietzsche

persistently attacked people’s generation of oppositions in their thinking and language, asserting that people see phenomena in terms of oppositions

that they invent and then assume the oppositions are a product of the phenomena rather than their thinking (1997:38).

That these oppositions continue to dominate academic, political and media language is explored more fully in chapter two.

The literature suggests these divisions and deliberate polarisations are part of a long and highly political history of government intervention and control, with a clear intention to rid teaching of progressive pedagogies. Indeed, citing the wider literature, Ward and Connolly claim that general societal concerns in the 1970s and 1980s led to the very specifics of English teaching:

Under Thatcherism, progressivism was conflated with the decline of traditional values, the erosion of national identity and a fall in national productivity. Suspicions that politically motivated teachers had taken over schools ... led Thatcher's Conservative government to seek to wrest control of the curriculum (2008:295-6).

One result was what became known as *The Cox Report* (DES, 1989), a government-commissioned review of English, which led to literature rather than language being placed at the heart of the English curriculum, and marked the point when Shakespeare became compulsory. As Ward and Connolly concluded, 'From the outset, then, literature's journey into the National Curriculum was bound up with concerns over the nation's moral and social welfare' (*ibid.*).

The new English curriculum, introduced in 1989, harked back to the work and beliefs of a group of Cambridge academics, in particular F.R. Leavis (1895-1978). Coles is one of many who has criticised the consequent dominance of their approaches on the teaching of Shakespeare, arguing that Leavis' 'concept of a literary text as a stable and transparent entity maintains a tenacious grip in school contexts' and that attempts to use 'non-traditional methods' to make Shakespeare more accessible are

located within a curricular paradigm that constructs Shakespeare very specifically as part of the literary canon, with all the attendant cultural baggage and traditions that Shakespeare has accrued ... (2013b:286).

The dominance of any approach appears problematic. John Hattie, responsible for a meta-analysis of over 800 international education studies (2008; 2012, and 2014 with Yates) has argued that the 'act of teaching ... involves a teacher who knows a range of learning strategies' (2012:16). Some talk in terms of the importance of a teaching repertoire (Alexander, 2008). Specifically regarding Shakespeare, others recommend a wide portfolio of approaches and pedagogies (for example, Stredder, 2004; Quigley, 2014). Yet the literature highlights considerable obstacles facing teachers wanting to employ alternative, or unfamiliar, teaching approaches and pedagogies in the Shakespeare classroom (Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2011; Irish, 2011). These include the additional time needed (at least initially, when addressing lack of familiarity), and, with some more student-led pedagogies, the change in dynamic from teacher as authority figure to teacher as facilitator. Furthermore, international literature on alternative pedagogies suggests barriers of real or perceived risks, both around classroom management and impact on attainment; the lack of understanding and/or support from fellow teachers and senior management; and some students' difficulties in adapting to different methods (for example, Niemi, 2002; O'Grady *et al.*, 2014). Whether or not teachers acquire the knowledge, confidence and skills to adopt such a repertoire highlights the further influence of professional contexts, in particular access to training. However, some (Harland & Myhill, 1997; Carter, 2015) suggest long-standing concerns about Initial Teacher Education (ITE) whilst others (Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group, 2016) raise concerns about Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL).



The specific nature of student attitudes and responses emerged as yet another influential feature of teachers' professional contexts. Student attitudes to Shakespeare are particularly well-documented, typically characterised as negative in terms of boredom (Galloway & Strand, 2010), and questioning as to 'why Shakespeare is particularly necessary or relevant for all to study' (McEvoy, 2003:112). Whilst some students may appear to believe they should study Shakespeare either because of his international status and/or because his plays are 'the best' (Yandell, 1997:278), others have proffered a more pessimistic view of student attitudes: 'Some are openly dismissive or antagonistic towards Shakespeare, and those who cooperate often do so at the outset, with a wearied spirit of forbearance' (Harris, 2003:41). These feelings and preconceptions spread beyond the classroom, as indicated by a Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) report (2016) suggesting that many parents – at least initially – also question the value of their children studying Shakespeare.

Finally, whilst some suggest that teaching is a 'cultural and social phenomenon' (Hodkinson & Smith, 2004:159), others argue for the inclusion of personal characteristics within the phenomenon of teaching. For example, Muijs and Reynolds have pointed to the importance of looking at teaching behaviours and beliefs (2011). This throws the spotlight on teacher identity, life histories and philosophies, an area extensively researched by the likes of Christopher Day. Along with Leitch, he has suggested that '... to neglect the stories of teaching and the narratives of teachers' experiences may be to collude in oversimplification and distortion' (Day & Leitch, 2001:407).

This last reference seemed particularly important within my research, given that each English teacher has to navigate their own way through the tensions and challenges described above, and determine what Shakespeare might mean within their classrooms. Yet whilst we know a fair amount about *what* teachers are required to do, and whilst there is a wealth of recommendations about *how*

English teachers should approach Shakespeare's plays, we know little about *why* each individual teacher responds to these directives and recommendations in the ways that they do. The literature indicates deeply personal connections to Shakespeare's plays. For example, some claim that 'Who we are and our own personal life experiences affect the way we connect with and approach teaching any particular play' (Banks, 2014:2). Others report highly emotive responses to teaching Shakespeare, both positive (Winston, 2015) and negative (Coles, 2013b).

Without a greater understanding of how this triangle of influences – the socio-political, the professional and the personal – interact and come to influence practice in the classroom, we are mostly in the dark when trying to analyse approaches used and variations in practice, both of which are at the heart of my research. For example, we know little that accounts for the variation in experience of teachers and, more importantly, their students. We know that student responses to Shakespeare can range from "Miss! Miss! Are we doing Shakespeare this week?" (RSC, 2016, no page number) to "I wanted to kill myself" (Coles, 2013b:261), but we do not fully understand why. This matters deeply, given the prominence afforded to Shakespeare, and the status of English in general within England's education system.

The importance of investigating variation was highlighted in Hattie's large scale studies. His conclusion that 'the greatest source of variance in our system relates to teachers' (2012:15) has been corroborated by the Social Market Foundation (SMF). Its research into inequality in education in England and Wales (Allen *et al.*, 2016) looked in detail at the nature of that variance, identifying characteristics such as teachers' lack of experience and subject knowledge as significant. SMF's work highlighted both the critical importance of understanding differences in teaching practice and impact on students, and the need to look at the individual teacher at the heart of those differences. This chimed with my research and its focus on variations in teacher beliefs and

practice, in particular *adoption* of approaches and pedagogies. It is important to note that the term ‘adoption’ has been used deliberately. Throughout this research I was cautious about the term ‘choice’, since lack of awareness is not a choice, nor is one’s own schooling, whilst access to research, support and training is not always a choice. If not necessarily choice, then, what influences awareness and use of particular pedagogies and approaches, and what accounts for variations? This was what this study aimed to explore.

## ***1.2 Research questions***

All of the above considerations led to the formation of the following research question: ‘How do England’s teachers experience the phenomenon of compulsory Shakespeare?’. Explicit boundaries were needed to make the research manageable, given the educational and international reach of Shakespeare. Compulsory Shakespeare focused research on the teaching of Shakespeare’s plays, and on secondary rather than primary. This further narrowed the research towards a focus on English teachers, who are tasked with meeting these curriculum and assessment requirements. Finally, treating the teaching of Shakespeare’s plays as a phenomenon forced an important fresh perspective on those characteristics and influences which have become so deeply ingrained into our national psyche that they risk being taken for granted, as explored more fully in chapter two. For example, the focus of compulsory study is Shakespeare’s plays not his poetry; these are taught within the English rather than drama curriculum, sit within reading and are assessed through writing, with limited focus on the text as spoken word. The high status afforded Shakespeare because of his reputation is matched by high stake assessments and accountability measures that are critical not only for students but also teachers (Isaacs, 2014). These characteristics are part of the phenomenon and clearly influence teaching, as explored throughout this research.

A set of sub-questions was developed, with the aim of illuminating the overall research question, as well as investigating areas of interest to the RSC (part-funding this PhD), as follows:

- What influences English teachers when they come to teach Shakespeare's plays?
- What accounts for approaches and pedagogies adopted, and any variations in practice?
- In particular, when, why and how do English teachers use active and rehearsal-based approaches?
- To what extent does training, both ITE and CPDL, prepare English teachers to teach Shakespeare's plays?
- How much does research and evidence influence the teaching of Shakespeare's plays?

### ***1.3 Methodology and methods***

My research needed a methodology that would facilitate the capture and analysis of highly subjective data relating to the personal experience of teaching Shakespeare. This focus, coupled with my interpretivist epistemology, led me to phenomenology and ultimately hermeneutic phenomenology. Cohen *et al.* highlight their relevance to this study:

the central endeavour ... of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within (2011:17).

To 'understand from within' English teachers' experiences of teaching Shakespeare's plays was the essence of my purpose. Phenomenology became the obvious theoretical framework, with some indicating particular characteristics of relevance to this research. Firstly, Fossey *et al.* described phenomenology as acknowledging 'that a person's "life world" is a social, cultural and historical product, as well as a pole of individual subjectivity' (2002:720). This highlighted the importance of social, cultural and historical factors as well as individual subjectivity, the importance of which has been indicated above. Secondly, Gray pointed out that phenomenology requires the putting aside of 'our prevailing understanding of phenomena', and revisiting 'our immediate experience of them in order that new meanings may emerge' (2009:24). For me, this was a particularly valuable concept. As explained below, I have strong personal connections with my research; phenomenology provided a constant reminder to look at the research with fresh eyes, separating myself as much as possible from personal experiences and beliefs through a reflexive approach, described in more detail in chapter three. Finally, Chan *et al.* claimed that phenomenology can help to 'illuminate assumptions and meanings ... that participants themselves may have trouble expressing' (2015:99). This is important because, as Giorgi and Giorgi (both phenomenologists) suggested, researching people offers a particular challenge:

Usually, the capacity to live through events or respond to different situations greatly exceeds the capacity to know exactly what we do or why we do what we do (2003:27).

Given the complexities and contradictions described above, phenomenology appeared to offer an approach that might help to 'illuminate assumptions and meanings' that English teachers might struggle or fail to articulate for themselves.

Qualitative tools are considered useful for overcoming what many (for example Berliner, 2002; Hammersley, 1997) regard as the specific challenges of education research when it attempts to explore social phenomena and causal relationships in the face of complex contextual variations. Phenomenology pointed to semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate method for exploring the deeply personal and situational circumstances of individual teachers, a view strengthened by early field research and a pilot study. As explained in more detail in chapter three, there were limitations to both, but hermeneutic phenomenology goes some way to addressing these concerns, researcher transparency and ‘positionality’ being one example.

## ***1.4 Researcher positionality and bias***

This research has been driven by a long-standing personal and professional interest in young people’s experiences of Shakespeare at school, and the wider impact that a positive or negative experience can have on their education. I trained as an English and drama teacher, have a long history in arts education, and was RSC Director of Education between 2004 and 2008. Throughout my career I have been profoundly aware of deep-seated prejudices, suspicion and negativity from large numbers of young people (mainly at secondary level) to Shakespeare, and that these negative feelings are sometimes shared by teachers who find teaching his plays one of the most challenging tasks they face.

These perceptions started with my own teaching career. I was a dedicated, energetic and ‘effective’ teacher, if results were anything to go by. In my final year of teaching I gained the best GCSE English results across the English department, a success I credited to the drama strategies I used. I had limited understanding of *why* I used those strategies and many of them I can now see were relatively superficial, but my students responded positively to the different

dynamic and activities that teaching in a drama studio offered – with one exception. Collectively we struggled with Shakespeare. My passion and enthusiasm got us so far, as did the level of trust my students placed in me, but they were bewildered by the language, could not see the relevance to their lives, and relentlessly questioned me on what it was I could possibly like about Shakespeare's plays. We muddled through, but the experience left me with a sense of frustration and personal failure.

With a stroke of irony, my next job was as a junior member of the RSC's Education Department. The experience transformed my practice and beliefs. I began to understand pedagogy in a way I never had as a teacher. At the same time, I had the privilege of direct access to the RSC's rehearsal-based approaches to Shakespeare, influenced heavily by the work of Cicely Berry, RSC Voice Director and author of many books on approaching Shakespeare (for example 1993, 2001, and 2007). Finally, I had the luxury of time for reflection, something conspicuously missing when I was a full-time teacher. These experiences were inspiring, but fuelled a sense of anger: my training had omitted approaches both pedagogically valuable in their own right, and capable of overcoming many of the challenges of the Shakespeare classroom. Over the next two years, and when I returned some years later as Director of Education, I met teachers and students whose experiences mirrored mine. As a result, in 2006 I spearheaded the RSC's *Teaching Shakespeare: Time for Change* campaign<sup>2</sup>, which ultimately led to the RSC *Stand up for Shakespeare* manifesto (2008)<sup>3</sup>.

In 2006 I also helped to establish the Learning and Performance Network (LPN), an initiative based on long-term partnerships between the RSC, schools and, in its later years, theatres. Amongst many features it included training in rehearsal-based approaches to teaching Shakespeare for primary and secondary

2 See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/feb/06/schools.news>.

3 See <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2008/teach-shakespeare-from-age-four-says-rsc/>.

teachers. Some of these teachers were originally offered the chance to study towards a certificate in the teaching of Shakespeare, accredited by the University of Warwick. The University also conducted independent research (Galloway & Strand, 2010). Results indicated statistically significant improvements in young people's attitudes to Shakespeare when their teachers followed the certificated training, alongside 'significant improvements in general attitude to school' compared with control classes (Strand in Winston, 2015:141). Strand concluded that, with appropriate caution around causality, 'this may well indicate that the benefits of the involvement with the LPN are more generalised than just in attitudes to Shakespeare' (*ibid.*), but suggested further research was needed.

I was offered the chance to conduct such research through a PhD, primarily funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with part-funding by the RSC. The initial proposal focused on teachers involved in the LPN, with the aim of creating a better understanding of rehearsal-based approaches and their implications for the Shakespeare classroom. The focus of my research shifted, however, as I became increasingly interested in the wider experiences of English teachers. Throughout the process I inevitably continued a close relationship with the RSC and, in an unexpected turn of events towards the end of this research, I returned to the Education Department to contribute to the professional development programme for teachers.

Yet these experiences, in particular the close relationship with the RSC and its approaches, clearly presented problems in terms of possible bias. A challenge throughout the research was trying to adopt a neutral, critical stance about all teaching approaches but rehearsal-based practices in particular. I frequently interrogated my writing to check that I was neither over- nor indeed under-playing the role and significance of these approaches, and the choice of hermeneutic methodology was partially influenced by the need to reflect on the potential for researcher bias. In the methodology chapter I provide more detail



about how I adopted a range of recommended strategies that included capturing, and then analysing, all my existing views on the teaching of Shakespeare (see Appendix L), and the keeping of a journal (see sample entries in Appendix J).

Most important, however, were the design of the interview schedule and data analysis. With the former I worked hard to craft open-ended questions that allowed teachers to describe practices that were important to them, rather than me. Only two questions, across the first and second interview schedules, mentioned teaching methods. The first, in interview one (see section two, question 3 of Appendix F) asked merely for a description of any particular teaching methods used. The second, in interview two (see section four, question 2 of Appendix G) mentioned active and theatre-based approaches but, as I detail in the methodology chapter, this was a deliberately chosen exhibit question which increasingly I left out. In terms of data analysis I worked through a systematic process, adapted from others' approaches to data analysis within hermeneutic phenomenology, to ensure that, to the best of my ability, findings were true to the data, rather than reflecting any pre-existing views or preferences I might have had. Again, more detail is provided in the methodology chapter.

## ***1.5 Terminology***

Terminology has been an important consideration in the context of this research, both within the wider field of education and pedagogy, and the specifics of teaching Shakespeare. Whilst all acronyms appear in a glossary (Appendix A) certain concepts are explained here because of their centrality to my research. However, it is important to note that others quoted in this study may well be using their own definitions.

Firstly, 'pedagogy' is problematic, partly because of the range of definitions and partly because the word 'does not enjoy widespread currency in England'

(Alexander, 2008:45). Alexander suggested that ‘the prominence of curriculum in ... educational discourse’ has resulted in a tendency to make ‘pedagogy subsidiary to curriculum’ and offered his own definition:

*... the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decision of which teaching is constituted (ibid.:47, italics in the original).*

This definition has been adopted by others, for example those working on the Teacher and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), which ran across the UK from 1999-2009 (James & Pollard, 2011). Yet whilst this definition is important in redressing the imbalance between curriculum and pedagogy, it misses any reference to the *learner*. Others have rejected definitions that only focus on the role and activity of the teacher, defining pedagogy as ‘any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in the other’ (Watkins & Mortimore, 1991:3). Yet this omits Alexander’s focus on ‘attendant discourse’ and ‘skills’, both of which appeared relevant to an understanding of pedagogy in the Shakespeare classroom; I therefore kept both definitions in mind throughout my research.

There are a bewildering array of terms to describe approaches used to teach Shakespeare. Literary criticism harks back, in particular, to F.R. Leavis. Within the teaching of Shakespeare, literary criticism has sometimes been labelled ‘desk-bound’ (Stibbs, 1998), to differentiate it from what are commonly referred to as ‘active’ approaches heavily associated with Rex Gibson, whose influence is considered in chapter two. To a lesser extent, active approaches are associated with theatre and drama companies who specialise in supporting the teaching of Shakespeare in schools. Stredder analysed the terminology and attempted to distinguish between ‘active’, ‘practical’ and ‘dramatic’ (2004:xv), terms often used interchangeably by teachers and theatre practitioners. However, important

distinctions have become increasingly clear through the work of theatre companies such as the RSC and Shakespeare's Globe, as explained in more detail in the next chapter.

For this reason I have attempted to distinguish between the terms 'active' and 'rehearsal-based'. For the likes of Reynolds (1991) and O'Brien *et al.* (1994) active approaches are not, *per se*, about getting young people to act; instead they are methods to help young people understand and access Shakespeare's plays through being actively, and sometimes physically, engaged with the text. Confusingly, active approaches often involve drama through techniques such as role-play. However, active approaches can take place in a classroom and, even more confusingly, can be done at desks. Furthermore, much rehearsal work, particularly initially, involves close textual reading which takes place sitting at tables, rendering the term 'desk-bound' to describe literary rather than active and rehearsal-based approaches even more problematic.

Theatre-, rehearsal-, and performance-based approaches are likely to be steeped in theatre. Their core focus of study is Shakespeare as performance, either as an end in itself, or as a vehicle for greater understanding (Shapiro, 2012). Most reflect rehearsal room practices which help actors engage with, and ultimately perform, Shakespeare's plays. I have therefore chosen to use 'rehearsal-based' as an umbrella term for theatre- or performance-based approaches, except where doing so would conflict with an original reference in the literature. It is important, however, to distinguish these approaches from *seeing* performance; for the likes of O'Brien *et al.* (1994), the *doing* of Shakespeare is the critical factor. Rehearsal-based approaches are more likely to require an open space such as a drama studio, and focus on a whole body experience of Shakespeare, which is essential to rehearsal and/or performance.

Finally, because of the importance of detailed analysis of teaching practice, I have attempted to differentiate between approaches, and pedagogy, though the two are often conflated in the literature and teachers' narratives. I have used the former term to describe activities, exercises and strategies that teachers use in the classroom. The latter refers both to educational theory as well as practices which should, though do not always, underpin those approaches. To clarify by example, I have described the use of film as an approach; whether that activity is teacher- or student-led and whether it included scaffolding, modelling and so forth would be analysed as pedagogy.

## ***1.6 Introduction to chapters***

Chapter two reviews the literature and starts by considering socio-political contexts: the well-documented nature of Shakespeare's status in English society, alongside the history of Shakespeare within education. There is an analysis of the literature around teachers' professional contexts, with a particular focus on awareness and use of pedagogies and approaches in the Shakespeare classroom. Finally studies on teachers' personal identity, life histories and philosophies are considered.

Chapter three summarises methodology and methods. It starts with a brief overview of both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology, summarising their histories, overlaps, differences, and the implications for this research. It then considers semi-structured interviews as chosen method. In the final section the approach to data generation and analysis is summarised, before concluding with an introduction to the nine English teachers interviewed.

Chapter four is the first of three chapters summarising findings. It focuses on the experience and influence of *socio-political contexts* in terms of politics, policy, culture and education as well as *local contexts*, the latter emerging as an

important consideration through data analysis. The first is well-documented in the literature, yet interesting variations emerged. Less well-documented were the impact of location, demographic, and school specific contexts, including whole school cultures. This chapter therefore addresses these interweaving contexts which form the backdrop to the experience of teaching Shakespeare.

Chapter five focuses on *professional contexts*: the teaching of Shakespeare itself and the pedagogies and approaches used. It considers teaching purpose, which appeared to dominate thinking as much, if not more than, pedagogical considerations. It analyses findings around student responses to the teaching of Shakespeare, before concluding with a review of training, and awareness and use of research and evidence.

Chapter six is the final data analysis chapter and addresses the complicated nature of *personal contexts*: how life histories, identity and personal philosophies were shaped by the contexts described in the previous chapter, but also shaped them in return, what is termed historicity within hermeneutic phenomenology.

Chapter seven discusses areas of commonality and contrast between the literature and data. Many findings corroborated the literature, but with a number of interesting and important variations, particularly at local, professional and personal levels. In particular, presence – and indeed absence – of personal experiences and characteristics emerged as highly influential within the data, though mostly undocumented in the literature.

Chapter eight: summarises key findings, with a reflection on the strengths and limitations of this study, before concluding with recommendations and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

Shakespeare's global status as 'cultural icon' (Wilson, 1990:210) or 'cultural phenomenon' (Rumbold, 2010:335) is well-documented. Lanier suggested Shakespeare has become a global brand, 'the Coca-Cola of canonical culture', his name and image now associated with a vast range of qualities and products, representing aspirations to benefit from 'association' with Shakespeare's global status (2007:93). Yet Lanier highlighted profound contradictions, for example in his exploration of the relationship between Shakespeare and pop culture where:

... Shakespeare's face remains the sign of that culture which pop proclaims it isn't, old-fashioned, elitist, artisanal, intellectual, moralistic, 'proper' art promoted by official educational and cultural institutions, but it also remains the sign of pop's desire ... for the kind of cultural authority, quality, legitimacy and upward mobility that Shakespeare continues to symbolize (*ibid.*:99).

In England these contradictions permeate many levels of society. The 2012 Olympics boldly presented Shakespeare as a source of great British national pride (Miniard, 2012). Dig beneath the surface, however, and Shakespeare's status provokes a range of conflicting emotions which Ward summarised well when he unpicked the claim of Prince Charles that Shakespeare defines the Englishman:

The fact that Prince Charles' assertion seems at once elitist and socially exclusionary, but then also shares an affinity with the idea of a 'communal solidarity', immediately reveals the difficulties we will encounter in dealing with this baggage and the Shakespearean 'business' (1999:12).

As the previous chapter indicated this 'baggage' runs deep within England's education system, as well as its socio-political and cultural history. This

inescapable backdrop to the teaching of Shakespeare is one of the many characteristics which shapes the lived experience of English teachers. Within the literature, despite a wealth of pre-existing research into some areas of this ‘phenomenon’, there is a notable paucity in others. The first section on socio-political contexts is therefore relatively brief, summarising the well-documented history, politics and policies associated with Shakespeare and education. The second section is more extensive, covering the ‘professional’ contexts of pedagogy in general, before moving on to the less well-chartered terrain of awareness and use of teaching approaches in the Shakespeare classroom. These are considered alongside the ecology of the Shakespeare classroom, the role and influence of training, research and evidence, and subject associations. In the final section there is a review of the literature as it relates to personal contexts. This is very limited where it relates specifically to teaching Shakespeare, yet the wider literature provides useful insights into the influential nature of teacher identity, life histories and philosophies.

## ***2.1 Socio-political contexts***

### **2.1.1 Why Shakespeare?**

Two recent books focusing on Shakespeare and education both asked this question; in fact Olive, in her book *Shakespeare Valued*, asked the question repeatedly, stating that ‘The curriculum is silent about what should be achieved through the study of Shakespeare’ (2015:25). Winston’s book *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company* revisits and updates previous analyses (by the likes of Blocksidge, 2003 and Irish, 2008a) of the ‘ideological controversies’ (2015:23) that have dogged the teaching of Shakespeare for the last one hundred years. What is clear from all of these accounts is that there is no coherent or consensual answer to the question ‘Why Shakespeare?’. For some teachers, and their students, the unsatisfactory answer

is 'I had to, you have to' (Yandell, 1997:285). For others (for example Belsey, 2007; Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2011) the answer lies in the qualities of Shakespeare's work that offer potential benefits for young people. A still dominant but more problematic alternative was offered by Brian Cox, whose influence is analysed below, and who talked of concepts of Shakespeare and universal truths (DES, 1989).

Some (Taylor, 1989) have suggested that Shakespeare's prominence within education owes as much to history, and his 'usefulness' (Bottoms, 2013:96) as it does to his perceived brilliance. Looking at Shakespeare on this basis offers important insights into the contemporary Shakespeare classroom and its teachers. In particular, two highly significant features of late nineteenth century Britain heavily influenced the teaching of Shakespeare: universal education and the establishment of English as a school subject. These go a long way to explaining *why* Shakespeare, but also *how* Shakespeare has been taught.

### **2.1.2 The purpose of universal education**

Until the late nineteenth century, education in England was mainly the preserve of the wealthy. Both Moore (2012) and Eaglestone (2009) reported two key reasons for the Education Act of 1870 which introduced universal education. The first draws on the Enlightenment and was heavily influenced by the work of the poet, school inspector and reformer Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) who believed that

the significant qualities of education were therapeutic and social: its central purpose was to sooth and ennoble the savage beast through the power of exposure to 'high culture' and 'reason' (Moore, 2012:48).

This Enlightenment view of education is still dominant, with Shakespeare a key feature (Bottoms, 2013) in 'civilising' young people. However, both Moore and Eaglestone suggested a second, more political, driver for universal education,



fuelled by concerns of civil unrest as the Industrial Revolution created large, poverty-stricken, urban populations. They, along with Bernstein (1971) and Apple (2002), have claimed that education is about state control of young people, driven by agendas that have little to do with the Enlightenment model and more to do with maintaining the political status quo. These two different views about the purposes of universal education suggest early influences on the teaching of Shakespeare which may still be present today.

### **2.1.3 English as a school subject**

Many (for example Irish, 2008a; Davison, 2009) note the short but telling history of English as a school subject. Pre-1870 education primarily focused on the Classics, Maths and Science. English mostly concentrated on philology – the study of language. If taught at all Shakespeare was within this context, with an emphasis on learning oratory. Eaglestone suggested the move to universal education prompted a replacement for the Classics (deemed too hard for the working classes), and traces the history of English as a subject back to the model of education used in India as early as 1835. Texts written in English were the basis for learning how to read and write, whilst education was used to promote ‘British values’ and culture amongst the native Indian population. Eaglestone concluded that it was the notion of English Literature as a ‘civilising force’ that ‘brought the subject back to Britain... to “re-civilise the native savages”’ (2009:11-12).

This focus on English Literature to deliver the twin purposes of ‘civilising’ and promoting British values gained momentum after the First World War. Many (Myhill, 1993; Coles, 2004; Davison, 2009) emphasise the particular significance of the 1921 Newbolt Report on English which, three years after the war ended, indicated a belief that the study of literature might create a more humane society with a strong motivation to avoid future man-made atrocities. The natural

conclusion is that universal education, experiences of education in India, and the horrors of the First World War prompted a highly influential mission to educate and ‘civilise’ the masses. The direct consequence was that English as a subject lost almost all of its earlier focus on philology. Instead, there was a need for texts worthy of study both for their literary qualities *and* for the way they promoted British values. As Bottoms pointed out ‘the well-established position of Shakespeare as national poet and moral philosopher made his plays appear to many the most appropriate material’ (2013:103). Shakespeare thus became a common feature of much English teaching. However, final decisions rested with individual schools and/or teachers – until the creation of a ‘National’ curriculum.

### **2.1.4 Shakespeare, Cox and the curriculum**

The 1988 Education Reform Act, and the ensuing National Curriculum, led to fundamental changes to the teaching of Shakespeare in England, obliging all secondary students to study Shakespeare, and introducing new Standard Assessment Tasks (commonly referred to as SATs). Taken by all students in the year they turned 14 (year 9), they specifically tested knowledge of a Shakespeare play. The DES review of English undertaken by Cox (1989) particularly influenced the new English curriculum and ‘exerted a powerful influence on education policy’ (Ward & Connolly, 2008:299). Furthermore, it has afforded Shakespeare ‘... an uneasy dominance in the reading strand of the National Curriculum for English ever since’ (Coles, 2013a:51). Thus not only did Shakespeare become compulsory for all, but his place became firmly fixed within *reading*: not speaking and listening, not performing, but reading. This alone has impacted significantly on *how* Shakespeare is taught and assessed.

### **2.1.5 Shakespeare, culture and a literary canon**

As referenced in the previous chapter, the canon that Cox proposed can be directly linked back to a group of Cambridge critics and academics working in the

earlier part of the twentieth century, most notably F.R. Leavis. For Leavis, then Cox, then politicians such as Gove (Bennett, 2010), notions of 'great' literature worthy of inclusion in a canon are both obvious, and 'common-sense' (Ward & Connolly, 2008). However, many (Eagleton, 2009; Maybin, 1996; Pike, 2003) have highlighted quite how hotly contested this notion is. They suggest complex problems associated with the 'common-sense' argument, which implies a neutral, objective, universal view of literature, rather than one which they contend is highly subjective and biased towards Western views and values. Furthermore, the question of who has the authority to define what constitutes 'great' literature is highly controversial (Coles, 2013a; Elliott, 2014).

A direct consequence of the Leavisite canon has been the systematic divorce of 'great' literature, and 'great' art, from mass culture, with some politicians polarising 'high' culture and 'cheap sensation and easy pleasures' (Gove, 2011: Paragraph 22). Coles pointed to the irony of Shakespeare, whose roots were in everyday culture and popular appeal, becoming the focal point of 'great' literature and intellectual ability: 'mass education itself has helped to distance Shakespeare from the cultural lives of ordinary people by constructing Shakespeare as an object of academic study' (2013a:63). Thus, according to Said, 'culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, differentiating "us" from "them"' (1993:xiii). The 'us' is a real or perceived intellectual elite who, according to Coles (*ibid.*) exert their perceived superiority, with all the accompanying access and perceived rights to power.

It is these concepts that the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) described under the notion of cultural capital, whereby Western society presents 'a systematic bias in favour of the possessors of inherited cultural capital' (1990:xi). Ward and Connolly examined how cultural capital works in practice:

By stating, for example, that Shakespeare has contributed to British culture and treating his works as cultural artefacts, people with cultural authority both affirm their authority to know what is of cultural value and make what they value the nation's culture (2008:302).

Those influenced by the likes of Bourdieu are likely to be concerned about the potential injustice of teaching Shakespeare to students who do not have easy access to the dominant cultural capital. An alternative is to extend cultural capital to all, through notions of cultural heritage and entitlement.

### **2.1.6 Cultural heritage and cultural entitlement**

The cultural heritage model is closely linked to notions of a canon of 'great' literature. Some have called for an entitlement to this heritage, or 'cultural literacy' as Hirsch termed it (1983). He argued that for people to operate successfully as citizens they all need access to the same and specific set of literary works, that a 'certain extent of shared, canonical knowledge is inherently necessary to a literate democracy' (*ibid.*:165). Although American, Hirsch was particularly influential on Conservative education ideology in the early twenty-first century, and was regularly cited by Michael Gove (2012; 2013c). For Gove, access to what he defined as England's cultural heritage is 'every child's birthright and we should be proud to teach it in every school' (2010: Paragraph 55). Many teachers subscribe to the view of Shakespeare as cultural entitlement (Kress *et al.*, 2005). At the same time, the language of many Shakespeare theatre practitioners (Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2011; Doran, 2013) is peppered by talk of entitlement and rights to Shakespeare and cultural heritage.

However, some (Ward & Connolly, 2008; Goodwyn, 2010a) highlight concerns about promoting a highly Westernised cultural heritage. Coles argued against the notion of a 'reified' canon of literature as birthright, as democratic entitlement. She suggested that a curriculum and assessment system with

Shakespeare ‘at their heart (albeit based on the rhetoric of inclusion and entitlement)’ supports and upholds ‘hegemonic practices’, creating ‘an illusory and excluding sense of Englishness’ (2013a:57), echoing Said’s reference to ‘us’ and ‘them’ (*op. cit.*). In a separate study Coles argued that current teaching of Shakespeare treats ‘students’ own experiences and cultural knowledge’ as ‘irrelevant’ (2013b:2). However, some suggest that relevance is not necessarily essential, and that students benefit from the challenge of studying texts outside their normal point of reference (Pike, 2003; Atherton, 2005). Others focus on the importance of *interpretation*. Many (Hall, quoted in Taylor, 1989; Gibson, 1998; Doran 2013) have focused on fresh interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays for the explicit purpose of establishing contemporary relevance, whilst others have claimed that

When students – particularly those who often feel excluded by literary or academic activities – realise that there is no stable, universally valid interpretations of Shakespeare, they gain automatic admittance to an interpretive space (Elsden, 1999:29).

### **2.1.7 Cultural (re)production**

For some, the problem lies less in the notion of a canon and cultural heritage than with how perspectives on culture are encouraged or discouraged in the classroom. Is culture perceived as ‘monolithic ... fixed and clearly defined by national boundaries’ or ‘pluralist ... embracing cultural contributions from a multiplicity of sources ... ?’ (Myhill, 1993:17). Supporters of the former view such as Cox (Jones, 1992) consider schools as sites of cultural *reproduction*. They are environments in which to learn about and appreciate a pre-defined cultural heritage, keeping texts separate from historical and contemporary context, whilst adopting a ‘model of reading which keeps in place the reader’s humble relationship to “great literature”’ (Jones, *ibid.*:16). Alternative views (Coles, 2013b; Moore, 1999) suggest schools should be sites of cultural *production* – a

place where students' experiences and perceptions are invited and the culture they produce is as valuable as the cultural artefacts that may have been used as stimulus. Indeed some (for example Coles, *ibid.*) suggest that school Shakespeare is at its most successful when taught within a cultural production model.

## **2.1.8 Assessment and accountability**

According to Coles

... the Leavises' promulgation of their close reading method by means of teacher training as well as university degrees [means] this model of reading is still commonly found to underpin examination questions and as the 'default' mode of many English teachers (*ibid.*:82-83).

The impact of assessment is not a new phenomenon (Bangs *et al.*, 2011). Some suggest it has become 'the factor in education that determines all others' (Goodwyn, 2014:22), dictating not only the nature of *what* is taught within English, but strongly influencing *how* English is taught. Many have been vocal about the way in which assessment has adversely influenced the teaching of Shakespeare (Yandell, 2008; Eaglestone, 2009). Sinfield was particularly critical of past A-Level assessments of Shakespeare, which he argued forced notions of universal values and beliefs onto students (1994). As Yandell & Franks highlighted 'The danger, always, is that what is assessed ends up being the pupil's knowledge of someone else's Shakespeare' (2009:257).

Mansell has repeatedly suggested education currently operates within a culture of hyper-accountability (2007; 2011), with assessment pressures exacerbated by Ofsted, which inspects schools, and league tables, used as a school comparison and measurement tool. Collectively they profoundly influence the school classroom (Jones, 2003). Furthermore, some (Kamens & McNeely, 2010; Isaacs, 2014) have suggested that accountability is no longer simply a national concern, but is now linked to international pressures through tests such as PISA

(Programme for International Student Assessment). Gibbons has concluded that these global comparisons have a profound influence on English as a subject (2013) whilst Goodwyn used highly charged language to suggest that as a subject English is always ‘in the spotlight’, and has been subjected to a culture of political ‘surveillance’ since the 1990s (2014:23).

### **2.1.9 Shakespeare and ‘ability’**

There is a complex relationship between Shakespeare and notions of ‘ability’, which are themselves problematic. Bourdieu described school-associated perceptions of ability as the

*Ideology of giftedness ... [which] helps to enclose the underprivileged classes in the roles which society has given them by making them see as natural inability things which are only a result of an inferior social status...*  
(1974:42; italics in original).

Jones proposed that the concept of ability is a product of mass schooling and ‘restricted access to its higher levels’ (2003:149), a characteristic therefore of the system, not individual students. Others view ‘labels’ as ‘limiting and even damaging’ when used to refer to ‘low ability pupils’, or ‘bottom set’ as ‘commonly heard in schools’, echoing Bourdieu’s claim that such terms are typically used about ‘socio economically disadvantaged learners’ (Rowland, 2017).

The literature points to a number of ways in which teachers’ experiences of Shakespeare have been influenced by these widely held labels, regardless of their accuracy. Some studies indicate that Shakespeare was considered of no or little relevance for ‘lower ability’ students. Atherton cited a 1983 exam board that suggested such students should be steered away from Shakespeare (2005). Whilst these attitudes have been overturned on a practical level, with Shakespeare now mandatory for all, what the literature indicates is that Shakespeare continues to be a flawed, yet all but universally accepted, measure of intelligence. For



example, McEvoy claimed that ‘Students are ... aware that an ability to appreciate Shakespeare is a marker in our society of being educated and intelligent’ (2003:103). Coles reaffirmed these views, following student interviews:

Throughout the interview data, Shakespeare’s reputation as a cultural and intellectual icon appears to hold a firm place in the consciousness of the students ... [and] may be used to make judgements about people’s intellectual worth (2013a:57).

### **2.1.10 The history of drama, theatre, and play in education**

A significant feature of the history of classroom Shakespeare is that English predated drama as a discrete school subject. Some have summarised the history and hierarchical nature of English in relation to drama (Franks *et al.*, 2006). They reported how, towards the end of the nineteenth century, drama became positioned within literature. Yet ‘the *performance* (as opposed to the *reading*) of even works of classical drama (Shakespeare or the Greeks), was omitted ... as being unworthy, irrelevant or deleterious in its effects’ (*ibid.*:64, italics in the original). Partly because of its head-start, and partly because early drama in schools seemed more concerned with self-expression (Fleming, 2012), English irrevocably established its primacy as gatekeeper of Shakespeare’s plays. This position was undoubtedly strengthened through the introduction of the National Curriculum. Furthermore, instead of potential collaboration between English and drama departments, where the latter still exists, there is a history of separation between the two (Ofsted (2005; Pitfield, 2006, 2011). Over the last thirty years or so, as English has become increasingly central to the focus on accountability and standards described above, the opposite has been true of drama. Its status, alongside all arts subjects, has suffered particularly at the hands of Conservative



politicians since Margaret Thatcher's government of the 1980s (Galton, 2010; Olive, 2015).

Drama and theatre suffer further from a 'general ambivalence toward the value of play that permeates our culture' (Winston, 2015:76). This is somewhat ironic in the context of Shakespeare, given the strength of Shakespeare's relationship with play(s), and that the language of play underpins so many references to Shakespeare (Stredder, 2004; Monk *et al.*, 2011; Winston, 2013). Some point to the well-documented relationship between play and learning through the work of Bruner (1915-2016) and Vygotsky (1896-1934) (for example, Banaji *et al.*, 2010). Despite this, the latter expressed concerns that play is 'being squeezed out of the curriculum' (*ibid.*:48), unsurprising given quite how suspicious some politicians have been about its educational value (Gove, 2012).

Where play and drama are encouraged there is a strong sense of hierarchy, which is particularly evident in the Shakespeare classroom. According to a government-commissioned booklet, *Shakespeare for all ages and stages* active and rehearsal-based approaches are encouraged and used with younger students. By comparison, 'close textual reference' and understanding 'the significance of the social, historical and cultural contexts of a Shakespeare play' are the focus of study in year 10 and year 11 respectively (DCSF, 2008:9). Thus learning 'progresses' from play to more cerebral activities, harking back to what is referred to as the Cartesian tradition and its belief in a mind/body split, which has had a long and lasting influence on education (Winston, 2015). Lucas and Claxton reported an 'Institutional prejudice against practical learning ... in favour of abstract reasoning' (*TESpro*, 2012:4). Others such as Yandell (2008) and Eagleton (2003) have argued for greater emphasis on what is termed embodied learning, arguing for the inclusion of the physical within learning instead of the notion of mind/body split. Winston cited the work of the contemporary philosopher, Mark Johnson, who 'rejects the idea of a disembodied

mind and situates bodily experience and higher propositional thinking along the same continuum rather than seeing them as fundamentally different' (2015:84).

Yet the impact of the Cartesian tradition can be seen in ongoing debates about both theory and practice in the Shakespeare classroom. For example, some have suggested that active and rehearsal-based approaches are intellectually inferior (Wilson, 1997). Others have expressed a belief in 'the twin poles of artistic and intellectual endeavour. One can dance or one can think' (McLuskie, 2009:124), suggesting that students can either enjoy Shakespeare or be engaged in serious study, but cannot do both. These views have been criticised in return. Some have decried 'that stodgy academic notion that the body and the intellect can't be engaged simultaneously' (O'Brien *et al.*, 2006:xii). Yet the belief that body and intellect are separate, that activities involving the former are inferior to the latter, may well explain the continued sense of a hierarchy when it comes to approaches to teaching Shakespeare, as explored more fully within this research.

## ***2.2 Professional contexts***

### **2.2.1 Pedagogy**

The teaching of Shakespeare does not operate in isolation from wider considerations and debates around pedagogy. The literature indicates that the very term is contested and 'seldom used in English writing about education' (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999:1), a view more recently supported in the work of Robin Alexander. Although focused mostly on primary education, Alexander's work on pedagogy has been extensive, for example through his book *Essays on Pedagogy* (2008). This highlighted significant problems relating to pedagogy within England. As a term it is 'muddled' in definitions (*ibid.*:3); furthermore, Alexander accused consecutive governments of a 'party-political takeover of pedagogy' (*ibid.*:2) 'first, under Thatcher, by prescribing a National Curriculum

and then, under New Labour, by prescribing teaching methods ...' (*ibid.*:89). Finally, specifically referencing the 'warring camps of "traditional" and "progressive"' mentioned in the previous chapter, Alexander asserted that divisive language about pedagogy has been deliberately 'nurtured by politicians and the press long after more discerning educators have abandoned it' (*ibid.*:73). This last claim is reflected elsewhere (Wilkins, 1999; Bangs *et al.*, 2011). The latter provided the example of a previous Education Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, dismissing alternatives to traditional pedagogies as 'trendy teaching' (*ibid.*:5), whilst Gove, when Education Secretary, described those who favoured progressive approaches as betraying the educational interests of working class students (2013a).

Others, however, suggest alternative views, claiming the problem lies in an 'obsession' with pedagogy, which is 'not just a pretentious term for "teaching", but an attack on subject-based education which it tries to replace with technological know-how or some "transformative" activity' (Hayes, 2017: Paragraph 12). The association of pedagogy with an 'attack' on subject-based education is an unusual slant on the polarisation of knowledge versus skills described in chapter one, but provides one of many examples of battle-like terminology. Alexander described the language of education in terms of a 'political assault' (*ibid.*:10), underpinned by a 'distinctly macho, not to say militaristic mindset' (*ibid.*:11). Elsewhere, politicians such as Gove talked about 'enemies' (2013b), creating the sense of education as a war zone, of opposition to, rather than collaboration with, teachers and education academics. Books such as Mortimore's *Education under siege* (2014) further reflect the sense of education as a battleground. According to Mortimore, an additional problem associated with pedagogy is that it concentrates too heavily on the role of the teacher, and not enough on the learner. He suggested that in contrast to teaching 'Learning cannot be directly observed' (*ibid.*:46), which may be part of the problem. Alternatively, as he later suggested,

‘we still know very little about the way learning actually takes place’ (*ibid.*:54). This has been a clear concern of John Hattie’s, whose work and books focus on ‘Visible Learning’ (*op. cit.*).

### **2.2.2 Awareness and use of traditional pedagogies**

Hattie and Yates have suggested that teaching has become dominated by transmissive pedagogies: ‘the type of teaching that is so highly familiar to anyone who has been to school [representing] traditional teaching methodology that has survived considerable criticism and attacks for over two centuries’ (2013:44). As indicated in chapter one, these pedagogies have attracted considerable political and media support. Some have claimed that England’s education system ‘constrains teachers to *teach* in certain related *ways* – for example, to adopt more “transmissive” modes of pedagogy’ (Moore, 1999:176, italics in the original). Others have suggested that failure in schools can be attributed to ‘A “transmission pedagogy”, in which a set body of knowledge is “delivered” to children and young people, highlight[ing] what students don’t know rather than what they do’ (Thomson, 2010:29). However, many dispute these assertions. For example, Muijs and Reynolds proposed that ‘direct instruction is one of the most effective teaching strategies available’ (2011:50), though they indicated effectiveness is dependent on context and suggested direct instruction is less effective ‘for teaching higher order thinking skills’ (*ibid.*:51). Some teachers, far from feeling constrained, are clearly passionate advocates of traditional pedagogies. Currently one of the most high profile examples is Michaela Community School in Wembley, whose teachers collectively wrote a book in favour of traditional teaching: *Battle hymn of the tiger teachers* (Birbalsingh, 2016). Much of the book talks about ‘the Michaela way’, with its strong focus on didactic teaching embracing ‘the pedagogical view of the teacher as the foundation of knowledge’ (Dyer, *ibid.*:28). Another chapter, *Knowledge, Memory and Testing*, (Kirby, *ibid.*) is scathing about the author’s prior experience of

teaching English where skills, rather than knowledge, were prioritised. The school, and book, have become a catalyst for fierce debates about pedagogy (Smith, 2016), a reminder that arguments about traditional versus progressive pedagogies remain current. Furthermore, it is an interesting example of how some teachers are engaging with debates around educational theory, and demonstrating agency and choice, all of which are considered below.

### **2.2.3 Awareness and use of progressive or alternative pedagogies**

By contrast, some national and international studies (Wrigley *et al.*, 2012; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014) have called for changes to the traditional or transmissive models described above. Many reference new, or alternative, pedagogies including active learning (explored below); deep learning (Fullan & Langworthy, *ibid.*), and self-regulated learning (as analysed by Muijs *et al.*, 2014). Some are associated with, or build on, the ‘hesitant, piecemeal and never-to-be-completed reform of schooling, associated with the progressive movement of the 1960s’ (Jones, 2014:95). Progressive pedagogies, heavily influenced by the work of the American John Dewey (1859–1952), tend to imply child-centred or child-led approaches. The role of the teacher is as facilitator of learning rather than transmitter of knowledge. Within the teaching of English, as far back as 1921 the Newbolt Report proposed progressive teaching methods (Davison, 2009). Yet it was perhaps *The Plowden Report* (1967) which became a focal point of progressive education in England. Although its focus was primary education it acted as a catalyst, exposing quite how extreme differences of opinion were on the nature not only of teaching methods, but the purpose of education (Jones, 2016). According to Jones, advocates for progressive education in England saw it as a natural extension of a socialist and inclusive agenda formed in the wake of the Second World War; critics regarded it as ‘spontaneous’ and ‘unsupervised’ (*ibid.*:101). Jones quoted a 1976 government report acknowledging that ‘In the

right hands' progressive education was capable of positive results but not so for 'less able and experienced teachers' who had 'allowed performance to suffer' (*ibid.*).

### **Active learning**

As indicated below, pedagogies and approaches associated with the teaching of Shakespeare are under-researched. Consideration of other pedagogies therefore offers useful insights where there are indications of similar characteristics. Research by Muijs has suggested the benefits of physical connections to learning, claiming that 'Learning is best accomplished when the learning activity is connected directly to physical experience' (2012a:55), echoing the views of those who promote 'embodied learning', also explored below. Others have declared a growing interest in, and evidence of, what are termed 'active learning' strategies as a means of addressing the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners (O'Grady *et al.*, 2014). Yet active learning is offered here not because of the evidence-base; like so many pedagogies the picture appears more complicated than can be fully explored here. Instead, it is offered because the experiences of those who have attempted, or resisted, it as a pedagogy offer valuable insights into the use of alternative pedagogies.

Active learning is defined as a pedagogy that keeps 'students mentally, and often physically, active in their learning through activities that involve them in gathering information, thinking, and problem solving' (Michael, 2006:160 citing a Collins dictionary definition). Some suggest that active learning, with its inherent 'learner-centred' focus, is problematic, citing barriers such as 'inadequate training, insufficient administrative support, large class sizes, and personal doubts about the effectiveness of using this pedagogical approach' (Ginsburg *et al.*, 2012:4). These obstacles emerge consistently in international studies (Niemi, 2002; O'Grady *et al.*, *ibid.*). In fact, Ginsburg *et al.* go further and

report studies of pre-service teachers that ‘repeatedly show resistance to active learning’ (*ibid.*). Some of this resistance appears to relate to doubts about efficacy and some to the changing role of the teacher ‘since it appears to position them in a more sidelined teaching role than they are accustomed to’ (Drew & Mackie, 2011:459).

Research further highlights problems of time and familiarity. Time needed for active learning appears to inhibit its use, partly because students and teachers require more time to establish ground rules than with more familiar pedagogies. Niemi corroborated this view: ‘Active learning methods require much more work and are much harder on a teacher than traditional teaching’ (2002:772). Finally, Drew and Mackie (*ibid.*) reported the perception that active learning is riskier for classroom management and results. The latter is not just a concern for teachers but students as well. All these findings chime with what the literature suggests about engaging in alternative pedagogies and approaches in the Shakespeare classroom, as explored below.

## **2.2.4 Awareness and use of approaches to teach Shakespeare**

### ***Literary criticism***

According to some, F.R. Leavis and his colleagues developed a method of ‘literary criticism’ (also referred to as ‘close reading’ and ‘practical criticism’) which ‘treats literary texts as independent, self-contained objects, with a fixed meaning waiting to be discovered by the skilful reader’ (Maybin, 1996:243). Others highlighted the dominance of this approach by suggesting that the Leavis method ‘has come to be at the very core of the teaching of English Literature in universities and schools’ (Davison, 2009:28). Another highly influential academic associated with literary criticism was A.C. Bradley, whose 1904 book



*Shakespearean Tragedy* remained a strong influence on the English classroom at least until the latter part of the twentieth century (Hawkes, 1996). Indeed Coles recently observed 'Realist notions of character inherited from Bradley [as] strongly marked in three out of the four classrooms in my study' (2013b:285). Leavis and Bradley were both part of a literary criticism approach that emphasised *reading* the text, from a so-called objective perspective, to access a 'true' meaning. Followers of Leavis and Bradley

assumed that you could read literature in a 'natural' way, as if you had no presuppositions. This natural, 'right' way would produce the 'right' interpretation of the text, in other words, 'the right answer' (Eagleton, 2009:27).

These views imply a single 'essential' Shakespearean text, waiting to be revealed, untainted by history and by the reader. They further suggest a 'right' answer, a 'correct' interpretation, can be uncovered through diligent study, where the 'pupil's response is carefully engineered and very definite distinctions are created between correct and incorrect interpretations' (Collick, 1989:4). These views have prompted a 'scholarly', 'desk-bound' approach to the text (Bottoms, 2013:101), with the emphasis on sitting and *reading* Shakespeare's plays in ways that mirror approaches to reading books.

The dominance of these approaches has attracted many critics. One of the most vocal was Rex Gibson (1932-2005), who claimed that

generations of scholars have transformed each play into a literary text. That legacy of textual scholarship has weighed heavily on school Shakespeare. It is part of a tradition that is deeply suspicious of enjoyment, that finds it hard to accept that pleasure and learning can go hand in hand. It sees literature as 'serious' and 'work', and drama as merely 'play' (1998:7).



These views are echoed elsewhere (Hudson, 1954; Reynolds, 1991; Stredder, 2004), although Olive argued that some criticisms relate to implementation, rather than literary criticism *per se* (2015). This is an important point, though frequently over-looked; criticisms of particular approaches frequently fail to question notions of (in)effective practice, a theme revisited in this study.

### ***Contextual approaches***

A number of academic approaches have challenged the ‘traditional’ notions of literary criticism. Many of these (including cultural materialism, reader-response theory, reception theory, new historicism) reject the idea of a single, ‘objective’, essential text, in favour of an interest in how history, context, the reader and their views, shape meaning and enable or indeed force new interpretations of the text. Olive suggested these approaches ‘gathered strength in schools around the millennium’ (2015:74), receiving ‘official government endorsement’ (*ibid.*:75) as part of the Curriculum 2000 reforms. Elsewhere, however, Olive proposed that new historicist approaches may have finally entered the secondary classroom but ‘are frequently misinterpreted or poorly implemented’ (2011b:255). Indeed, some suggest that these newer contextual theories have had minimal impact on the secondary Shakespeare classroom, treated as ‘... “add-ons”, to be learned after you’ve mastered the “natural” method of interpretation’ through literary criticism (Eagleton, 2009:27); whilst others bemoan the content of English as ‘a thin gruel of context-independent literacy activities’ (Yandell, 2008:36).

### ***Film-based approaches***

Film-based approaches are now firmly-established and popular. Coursen provided a possible explanation: ‘All of us spend time with film and television so it is not a foreign world (as “Shakespeare” tends to be for many students)’ (1997:3). Perhaps tellingly, it is not only students who are comfortable with film

but also their teachers, making their adoption easier than methods with which they might be unfamiliar. However, these approaches are not unproblematic. Pennacchia analysed *The Animated Tales*<sup>4</sup>, ‘one of the most widely used didactic tools in British primary and secondary schools’ (2013:60). She summarised concerns expressed in the wider literature that *The Animated Tales* were created to prompt respect for Shakespeare and were linked to ‘cultural imperialism’ (*ibid*:61), echoing similar concerns elsewhere about the need to question the values of those who adapt Shakespeare’s plays (Bottoms, 1996). Some argue that film-based approaches promote passivity (Coursen, 1997). For others, the potential for greater interactivity is there, but has yet to be realised (Worthen, 2007).

### ***Active and rehearsal-based approaches***

Throughout this research, active and rehearsal-based approaches have been adopted as the terms used to describe methods associated with drama and theatre. What these approaches appear to share is a commitment to playfulness (Winston, 2015), young people’s ownership of Shakespeare (Stredder, 2004; Gibson, 1998), inclusion (Stredder, *ibid.*), child- or learner-centred teaching (Stredder, *ibid*; Gibson, *ibid*); interpretative choices (Neelands & O’Hanlon, 2011) and the creation of shared meanings through treating Shakespeare as a vehicle for cultural production. Indeed, Stredder called active approaches ‘the pedagogy of “Shakespeare shared”’ (*ibid*:8). Yet there are key differences, in both approach and influence, which require separate consideration.

### **Active approaches**

The work of Gibson’s ‘Shakespeare in Schools’ project (1986-1994), and the encouragement of active approaches through training, books, articles and school

4 The BBC’s 30 minute abbreviated versions of twelve Shakespeare plays.

texts, known as the Cambridge School Shakespeare, has been ‘the single most influential initiative in the teaching of Shakespeare’ (Stredder, 2004:5), a view echoed by Winston (2015). Gibson’s passion was to make Shakespeare accessible and enjoyable for students of all ages and abilities, believing that ‘The task for Shakespeare teachers is to make “studying Shakespeare” equate with “enjoying Shakespeare”’ (1998:25). The key to doing so was through ‘*active methods* which open up the dramatic and imaginative possibilities of Shakespeare’s plays’ (1994:143, italics in the original). These methods suggest, though do not always require, the use of drama. According to Winston, who analysed in detail RSC approaches and how they differ from Gibson’s, there is a sense with the latter that ‘the desks are still there for much of the time’, that exercises are not ‘*that* physically active, and there is much reading aloud, talking in pairs and simple tableau work’ (2016:43, italics in the original). Cox declared that the Shakespeare in Schools’ project

has demonstrated that the once-traditional method where desk-bound pupils read the text has been advantageously replaced by exciting, enjoyable approaches that are social, imaginative and physical (DES, 1989: Paragraph 16).

Since Cox, government recommendations on *how* to teach Shakespeare have consistently referenced active and theatre-based methods (Olive, 2015), particularly through the already referenced DCSF publication, *Shakespeare for all ages and stages* (*op. cit.*).

### **Rehearsal-based approaches**

Rehearsal-based approaches focus on learning about Shakespeare *through* performance and the use of rehearsal techniques. Furthermore, whilst Gibson’s work was designed to take place in classrooms, rehearsal-based work, though capable of being adapted, suggests something closer to the open space of a

rehearsal room. These approaches emphasise fresh interpretations of Shakespeare's plays (Doran, 2013), alongside language and embodied learning, reflecting the work of Cicely Berry. Indeed, although Gibson was the more influential within education, it was Berry who was the 'key figure behind the speech and language work central to' his work (Olive, 2012a:4). Berry developed a 'legendary' body of work (Winston, 2015:37) and profoundly influenced the RSC's education work, shaping many of the approaches now employed with teachers and students. Berry's work with actors led her to argue that Shakespeare's 'heightened language' needs 'to be experienced actively in order for it to be fully understood' (in Stredder, 2004:vii). Indeed, her strong conviction has been that

the opposition between the intellectual and the physical that is so deeply rooted in our culture works against our ability to feel the power and the meaning of Shakespeare's plays through the language itself (Winston, 2015:38).

### ***Spoken approaches and reading round the class***

Echoing claims made about active learning, some suggest that active and rehearsal-based approaches are 'demanding' and 'unavoidably time consuming' (Haddon, 2009:111). Bottoms concluded that even when teachers share the ideals of early pioneers such as Caldwell-Cook (1886-1939)<sup>5</sup>, 'in practice, this seldom meant more than "reading round"' (2013:108) the class. Thus the most frequent concession to treating Shakespeare's plays as texts has become the reportedly much loathed 'dead and boring' practice of reading the text out loud, around the class (Yandell, 1997:280). Some talked despairingly about 'the combination of embarrassment, humiliation, and boredom suffered by generations of young people when asked to read Shakespeare aloud in class' (Reynolds, 1991:5).

5 An early advocate of using drama and theatre in the classroom through his work on what he termed *The Play Way*.

However, Monk *et al.* reported findings suggesting that students who read aloud had more positive attitudes to Shakespeare (2011), though this was in the context of students engaging in a range of spoken and drama-related activities, of which reading aloud was one of many.

### ***Awareness, use and debate***

An important consideration with reference to the above is the extent of awareness and use of particular approaches. As already indicated, some have suggested that historic dominance of literary criticism over other approaches has continued well into the twenty-first century (Stredder, 2004; Boustead, 2013). Boustead criticised English teachers for being too steeped in close textual analysis to approach Shakespeare in more engaging, dramatic ways. Elsewhere, comments from English students such as ‘We don’t normally get to do drama’ (Bellamy, 2005:9), alongside a survey of English A-Level students reporting limited access to drama (Green, 2006) suggest the continued accuracy of older findings that literary approaches dominate whilst ‘performance-based strategies’ are ‘ignored or under-utilised’ (Wade & Sheppard, 1994:27).

Despite the apparent preponderance of literary criticism approaches *in the classroom*, active and rehearsal-based approaches appear to dominate debate and disagreement *outside it*. As indicated, many educators, theatre practitioners and companies have promoted active, creative and rehearsal-based approaches (Reynolds, 1991; Gibson, 1998; Stredder, 2004; RSC, 2010; Banks, 2014). By way of contrast, some Shakespeare scholars have been fiercely critical of these approaches (most notably, Wilson, 1997; McLuskie, 2009; and Olive, 2013; 2015). Olive criticised the RSC for ‘constructing’ Shakespeare ‘not as a wide range of knowledges and practices on which students will be assessed through coursework or examination, but primarily as performance and rehearsal’ (2011a:255-256). Wilson described Gibson’s ‘Shakespeare in Schools’ project as ‘charismatically

anti-intellectual in its exhortation to joy' (1997:63). McLuskie criticised both Gibson and the RSC, arguing that Shakespeare has been 'morphed into the place of creativity and progressive child-centred learning' (2009:130). She has been equally critical of performance-based approaches:

the idea that Shakespeare 'wrote for performance' has supported the view that the experience of Shakespeare in performance is critical to the appreciation of his plays and that experience will in and of itself produce educational value (*ibid.*:125).

Elsewhere, Coles has argued that active approaches do not necessarily lead to greater enjoyment, citing students she interviewed who 'emphatically declared that they had no desire to study another Shakespeare play' despite their teacher using 'a wide repertoire of active methods ...' (2009:47). Coles was further critical of the RSC, claiming its approaches failed to neutralise 'the toxic effects of the Key Stage 3 SATs test' (*ibid.*:33). Yet the extent to which awareness, and criticisms, of approaches has influenced practice was unclear, and was therefore an area for further exploration within this research.

## **2.2.5 Effective practice**

As already indicated, some have suggested that criticisms of individual approaches might be better directed at practice. Gibson's reference to 'free-wheeling, active explorations' (1998:17), suggests a lack of rigour often associated with poorly implemented progressive pedagogies and is perhaps what prompted Stredder to 'suggest how one can focus and sharpen the use of active techniques – which sometimes seem to surround us like a sea of useful, but chaotic, flotsam and jetsam' (2004:xiv). Elsewhere, Blocksidge referenced Allen's criticisms of Gibson's work, which 'can ... conceal real muddle and lead to a free-for-all in which the potential richness of Shakespeare *as* Shakespeare is somehow missed (2003:15; italics in original).

All these references highlight the need to consider effective practice. In an implicit criticism of the RSC Coles suggested ‘a false dichotomy between “desk-bound” teaching (bad) and “active” teaching (good)’ (2013b:47). This criticism was refuted by Winston, who asserted that the RSC ‘never attacked “desk-bound *literary criticism*” but has instead sought to counter “desk-bound *ineffective teaching*”’ (2015:114; italics in original). As Winston concluded, ‘all teaching approaches ... need to be used carefully and in a considered fashion if they are to encourage learning and not become mere activity’ (2015:48). Elsewhere, Wright warned that students can be engaged in ‘lively activities’ (2005:13) but still not understand aspects of the text, a view echoed by Haddon (2009). However, it is important to note that the very concept of effective practice has attracted fierce debate, with some emphasising that ‘The outcomes of teaching depend upon so many variables ... that attempts to formulate testable hypotheses about effective teaching are rarely worthwhile (Bassey, 1995:143). Others have criticised a focus on effective practice divorced from the purpose of education:

questions about ‘what works’ ... are always secondary to questions of purpose. It is only when we have provided an answer to what we hope to achieve that we can begin to ask questions about the ways in which we might be able to achieve such outcomes (Biesta, 2010:500),

a view reinforced by others (James & Pollard, 2011).

## **2.2.6 The role and influence of training**

The experience of teaching Shakespeare is inevitably influenced by the presence, absence and quality of teachers’ wider training. The history and politics of initial training in England, known variously as initial teacher education (ITE) or initial teacher training (ITT) is succinctly summarised by Oancea. She referenced the impact of the economic and educational turmoil of the 1970s, with teachers and teacher educators being ‘accused, concomitantly, of having insufficient non-



ideological *content knowledge*, and of having an excess of (ideological) *sociological and pedagogical knowledge*' (2014:506; italics in the original).

Since then ITE 'has consistently been a significant site of social and political struggle' (Menter, 2010:9), a view echoed by MacBeath, (2011). Others report the tensions over whether teaching should be a theory- or skills/competency-based profession. Beach & Bagley described 'a policy trajectory' lasting forty years, 'committed to resolving any apparent tensions between theory and practice by removing theoretically-based professional knowledge altogether ...' (2013:386). Since 1992 there has been a greater focus on 'practical competencies' (Harland & Myhill, 1997:4), with concerns raised that training can take place 'without any reference to the wider intellectual, social and cultural learning necessary to equip student teachers with the appropriate resources for a professional career' (*ibid.*).

Government policies saw ITE change during the latter part of the twentieth century from predominantly university-based to 'an array of alternatives' (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012:153) such as SCITT (school-centred initial teacher training), School Direct, and Teach First<sup>6</sup>. Experiences of ITE now vary considerably according to *route* (Hobson *et al.*, 2006). Variability of *content* was raised as an issue in a recent comprehensive government-commissioned study known as the Carter review. In particular, Carter expressed a serious concern around the 'variability in the way subject knowledge is addressed. Given the importance of subject knowledge for good teaching, this is not satisfactory' (2015:7). This echoed an earlier report suggesting most trainees enter the teaching profession with feelings of insecurity around subject knowledge (Hobson *et al.*, *ibid.*). Carter emphasised the important role of 'subject-specific pedagogy' (*ibid.*:49) but concluded that important areas were missing from some courses. Amongst wide-ranging recommendations, he advocated greater emphasis on

6 These are school-led training routes as outlined here: <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/explore-my-options/teacher-training-routes/school-led-training>.



supporting teachers to access and use evidence, and the need for stronger links between ITE and CPDL.

Yet the literature presents CPDL as a concern as well, with workload hindering teachers' ability to access it (Sellen, 2016), echoing previous concerns raised by the Education Select Committee who decried 'the lack of opportunities for ... professional development' (2012:4). A government-commissioned Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group raised additional concerns, stating that 'Too often, teachers and their pupils are let down by poor quality training' (2016: Paragraph 12). This group created a new 'Standard for Teachers' Professional Development', launched in July 2016. Whilst its potential impact post-dates this research, its emphasis on effective CPDL requiring a 'partnership' between teacher, school leaders, and CPDL providers is noteworthy. Further details are provided about the necessary ingredients underpinning effective CPDL, with particular focus on the critical role of school leadership. Other studies indicate the 'significant role that teacher attitudes and beliefs play in the sustainability of practices' (King, 2014:19). Collectively, these studies suggest a number of potential influences on teachers' experiences of training, as explored within this research.

There were limited references within the literature to Shakespeare-specific CPDL, though a number of books support teachers' professional development (Gibson, 1998; RSC, 2010; Banks, 2014). CPDL, where it exists, is mostly provided by organisations who specialise in Shakespeare as performance (for example, Shakespeare Schools' Festival, RSC, Shakespeare's Globe, the National Theatre), though the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) and the Prince of Wales Teaching Institute also offer some Shakespeare-specific CPDL. Winston's research into the role and influence of the RSC's LPN provides rare insights into Shakespeare-specific CPDL, and is therefore examined in detail below.

## 2.2.7 The nature, role and influence of research and evidence

There are increasing calls for teaching to be more of an evidence-based/informed profession, as indicated by the government-commissioned report *Building evidence into education* (Goldacre, 2013). Yet the ‘contested nature of research evidence’ (Nutley *et al.*, 2007:268), indicates ontological and epistemological differences between positivists/realists and constructivists. As a brief overview, the former are more rooted in notions of education as an *evidence-based* profession, similar to medicine (Hargreaves, 1996, 1997; Slavin, 2008; Goldacre, *ibid.*), emulating the natural sciences as closely as possible, with Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) seen as the ‘gold standard’ research tool. What counts as quality, robust evidence tends to be restricted to research conducted by academics, with teacher researchers considered problematic because they are perceived as biased (Oakley, 2001) and lacking the necessary level of research skills. Finally, positivists/realists believe that teaching policy and practice should be guided by the principles of ‘what works’, based on findings from meta-analyses (also known as systematic reviews or research syntheses). These views have dominated government policy in England, gaining support from Labour and Conservative/Coalition politicians (Brown, 2013).

Those leaning more towards constructivism challenge the above, citing the complexities of the social sciences and education in particular (Berliner, 2002). Most criticisms focus on four core concerns: the dominance of one research tool, namely RCTs, often to the exclusion of other methods (Menter, 2014; Thomas, 2004); ignorance of the history of research in education and its past failures (James, 2013); privileging of certain types of evidence (Hammersley, 2004); and over-simplistic use of findings. For example, Levin pointed out that even exponents of meta-analyses such as Hattie were concerned that findings ‘are being used simplistically to make unwarranted decisions’ (2013:6), whilst Muijs

*et al.* referenced criticisms of meta-analytic methods (2014). Consequentially, many (James & Pollard, 2011; Sharples, 2013; Brown, 2013) opt for the term *evidence-informed* rather than *evidence-based*, believing that evidence can only guide (Thomas, *ibid.*) and that teaching practice needs to be informed by a more inclusive range of research, evidence and teacher judgements.

However, there is a well-documented history of academic research and evidence having low impact on actual practice (Hargreaves, 1996; Brown, 2013). A number of studies have documented the barriers to teacher engagement in research (for example, Nelson & O’Beirne, 2014). Some suggest the gap between research and practice has been fuelled by lack of access to journals (Nye, 2015), though this may soon be addressed by the new College of Teaching (Hazell, 2017). For others, the challenge is around skills, since teaching is not a research profession (Bamfield, 2014). Cordingley proposed a different challenge, that attempting

new strategies based on evidence from elsewhere always involves the risk that those strategies may not work in this or that particular context. So teachers need to believe strongly in the relative gains before taking a risk with untried methods (2004:79).

However, others argue there is a ‘lack of interest if not outright resistance of practitioners to research evidence’ (Levin, 2013:5), which could be attributed to the influence of personal experiences and philosophies. For example, Thomas proposed that:

Teachers come to teaching with a set of beliefs and understandings, and these sometimes seem to be impermeable (or at least only semi-permeable) to the kinds of evidence emerging from certain kinds of educational research (*ibid.*:12).

Equally, James suggested that (im)permeability of evidence is linked to ‘the extent to which it [the research] accorded with existing practices and beliefs’

(2005:107). This has significant consequences for teachers' use – or rejection – of evidence because teachers 'dismiss research findings that challenged their assumptions' (*ibid.*). Gough referenced 'a number of initiatives to develop research capacity in education' (2013:70) in recent years, the largest of which was the TLRP initiative. Yet an evaluation concluded that 'impacts have mostly been limited in scale' (Parsons & Burkey, 2011:11).

### ***Research into teaching Shakespeare***

Any teacher seeking research into the teaching of Shakespeare is likely to be disappointed, since it is limited both in England and internationally (Strom, 2010; Coles, 2013b). There has been some scholarly research in England into the use of different approaches; for example the survey by Wade and Sheppard (*op. cit.*). Batho's 1998 survey of Shakespeare in secondary schools again analysed data on teaching methods but concluded that 'further research needs to look at the effect of certain teaching approaches on pupils' learning' (1988:172). Yandell has conducted a number of studies into the teaching of Shakespeare, with a particular interest in the challenges of the urban and multicultural classroom (for example 1997, 2008). He has concluded that drama can help young people to make connections that increase the relevance of Shakespeare's plays to their lives. Others report similar findings and benefits (Gilmour, 1994; Gibson, 1993, 1998; Lighthill, 2011; Banks, 2014). However, some have significantly challenged these claims. For example, Coles questioned the efficacy of active and rehearsal-based approaches as suitable for preparation for external assessments and the time they needed. She further argued that

Much of the literature which promotes 'active Shakespeare' and makes grand claims about the educational experience ... fails to make any clear distinction between the generic contribution drama as a pedagogy makes to

learning, and the specific purpose of Shakespeare taught in this way (2013b:293).

This statement suggests the need for more research into approaches, and greater clarity around purpose of particular methods.

### ***Research into and evidence emerging from the work of the RSC***

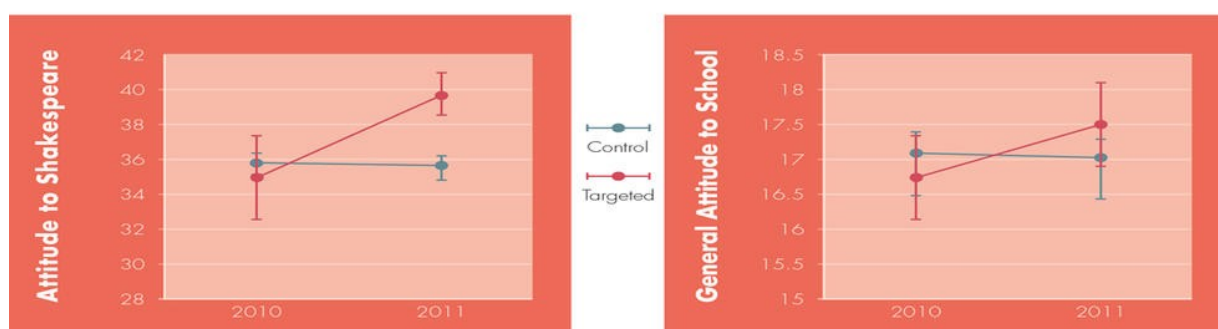
Coles suggested that the work of the RSC has generated by far the most significant research and evidence (*ibid.*), necessitating separate analysis of their findings. This research has focused on the Learning and Performance Network (LPN), established in 2006 and credited with having ‘a significant effect on the ways in which teachers approach the teaching of Shakespeare’ (Thomson, *et al.*, 2010:20). A core characteristic was a year-long training programme for both primary and secondary teachers, initially co-delivered with the University of Warwick, leading to a Post-Graduate Certificate in the Teaching and Learning of Shakespeare. A requirement was that teachers undertake and write up action research projects; by 2015 116 teachers had done so (Winston, 2015). Meta-analyses of their projects, alongside case studies, complement three comprehensive external evaluations (Galloway & Strand, 2010; Neelands *et al.*, 2009; Thomson *et al.*, *ibid.*). Finally, the RSC commissioned significant quantitative research into its work through an Attitude to Shakespeare survey, developed by CEDAR, the research arm of the University of Warwick. Winston’s book into the LPN provides a detailed summary of the research and evidence emerging from these reports and surveys; he concluded that ‘The evidence is demonstrable that involvement in the LPN did, indeed, impact on how teachers taught Shakespeare’ (2015:130).

CEDAR’s 2007 analysis of over 1500 secondary students reported most had negative attitudes to Shakespeare prior to their school’s involvement in the LPN. A repeat study in 2009, two years into the programme, found no evidence of

significant changes in attitude to Shakespeare, leading to conclusions that ‘The results demonstrate how hard it is to effect change in quite deep seated negative attitudes to Shakespeare’ (Galloway & Strand 2010:25). However, ‘considerable school variation’ was identified (*ibid.*:24). More interestingly, Galloway and Strand reported variation in attitude to Shakespeare between classes as ‘four times greater than the variation between schools. This suggests classroom practices may be particularly important in accounting for variation in attitudes to Shakespeare’ (*ibid.*).

However, according to Strand, the initial survey focused on “whole school” effect’ (in Winston, 2015:136) and ‘may have been too generalized to detect the specific and more localized impact associated with the LPN’ (*ibid.*). A separate 2010 survey, using control and target groups, reported ‘highly statistically significant’ (*ibid.*:140) changes in attitudes to Shakespeare amongst secondary students in the target classes. Interestingly, these classes also indicated significant changes in attitude to school. The results were captured in a graph, used in Winston’s book and reproduced here.

*Illustration 1: Graph showing attitudes to Shakespeare and school*



The title of Winston's book, *Transforming the teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, makes a bold claim, given that 'transforming' implies profound (typically positive) change. Yet Winston suggested that both the CEDAR report and the one by Thomson *et al.* are 'very clear about the transformation effects' on lead teachers' classroom practice (*ibid.*:125). Thomson *et al.* reported that 'Without exception' those teachers benefiting from the one year training programme 'significantly changed their teaching practices not only in relation to the teaching of Shakespeare but also in relation to work with other texts' (2010:5). In a separate study, a teacher talked about the effect in her school of acquiring rehearsal-based approaches: 'even the more reluctant members of the staff have completely changed their methods and attitudes towards teaching Shakespeare' (RSC, 2008:1). The frequency with which change in practice was referenced highlights practices *before* engagement with the LPN. A number of English teachers reported the approaches were as unfamiliar to them as to students. For several teachers, engaging in new teaching methods, particularly those involving drama, was clearly a point of significant departure and potential anxiety.

However, Thomson *et al.*'s report highlighted that not all practice was changed, let alone transformed. They suggested teachers had 'a strong emotional response to students' work and their own success in engaging the students in the Shakespeare activities' and that

teachers were being moved by the feeling that something difficult was being conquered, something boring was being made interesting. These feelings did not necessarily encourage them to emphasise meaning-making and interpretation in their lessons with young people (*ibid.*:25).

The implication is that 'these feelings' undermine teachers' ability to focus on *learning*. Reflecting on these findings Winston suggested 'These observations are usefully cautionary' (2015:125), concluding that they '... indicate that the



emotional nature of some of the teachers' comments' (*ibid.*) is not always matched by an understanding of the underpinning pedagogy. This echoes earlier points about the need to focus on pedagogy, as separate from the specifics of individual approaches.

## **2.2.8 The ecology of the Shakespeare classroom**

### ***Classroom environment, management and behaviour***

Some researchers (Kress *et al.*, 2005; Gallagher, 2007; Franks, 2014) make explicit the influence of architecture and environment on teaching and learning. Others have problematised the oft taken-for-granted phenomenon of the English classroom (Monk *et al.*, 2011), where students and teacher predominantly sit, and the former face the teacher or a white/blackboard. This classroom environment dictates, and mitigates against, particular teaching and learning approaches. At its most simplistic it sets up a hierarchical approach to teaching and learning that is more conducive to transmissive pedagogies. Furthermore, it makes physicalisation of learning through active or rehearsal-based approaches significantly harder; not impossible, but harder. Teacher observations and student comments (Irish, 2010; Irish, 2011) indicate positive responses where changes to the learning environment do occur, with the RSC (2008) reporting that teachers who effectively use drama approaches suggest improvements in behaviour. However, using drama to teach Shakespeare requires specific classroom management skills that some teachers may lack. Malin described some of these challenges when he reflected that:

As a school-teaching advocate of an active approach, I confess that my attempts to engage large classes of unmotivated adolescents in the joys of Shakespeare have sometimes been disastrous (2010:176)

leading him to 'revert grudgingly' (*ibid.*) to keeping students seated.



## ***Student attitudes and responses***

Survey findings referenced above suggest student attitudes to Shakespeare tend to be negative (Galloway & Strand, 2010). Elsewhere boredom is commonly associated with classroom Shakespeare across both literature and media reports (Evans, 2006; Thomson, 2010; Coles, 2013b; Gardner, 2015). However, Thomson proposed this is a global phenomenon about school in general (*ibid.*:13). Barber went further, suggesting a ‘crisis in boredom and frustration among students’. (2014: Paragraph 13). Neelands linked student perceptions of education as ‘reductive and meaningless’ with ‘The “behaviour crisis” which I believe we are experiencing in many of our schools’ (2004:15). Whatever the root of the problem, many concur that student perceptions are of difficulty. Wright described Shakespeare as the ‘maths of English’ (2005:3) whilst Stredder claimed that for ‘most learners’ Shakespeare presents ‘a reality of problems and barriers’ (2004:5). Yandell and Franks suggested a more complex picture of ‘a wide variety of conflicting and contradictory attitudes’ but there is likely to be an ‘element of fear’ (2009:245), related to anxiety about being wrong, or appearing foolish. McEvoy cited one of his A-Level students describing ‘a sense that Shakespeare was a more “serious” subject, and so I initially approached it with more fear of being wrong than other texts’ (2003:113). Fear of being wrong, or appearing foolish, seems exacerbated when drama is involved. O’Brien *et al.* described teachers having to battle against what they suggested as ‘the basic teenage commandment: Thou shalt not look foolish’ (2006:38).

Many suggest that language lies at the heart of the problem. One teacher survey reported that 85% thought that Shakespeare’s language ‘afforded the biggest difficulty for pupils’ (Batho, 1998:169), a view echoed more recently by many others (Gregory, 2003; Harris, 2003; Martindale, 2008). Yet Boustead dismissed language as the difficulty, instead accusing English teachers of being overly reverential regarding Shakespeare (2013). Others, however, suggest alternative

or more nuanced analyses. Yandell and Franks proposed that it is less the language than the ‘grammar and prosody – the organisation and rhythm of the language’, concluding that ‘The best answer to the problem of Shakespearean language lies in performance – not in translation activities or long lectures about the complexities of the iambic pentameter’ (2009:245).

It is a recurring theme in the literature, that active and rehearsal-based approaches improve students’ abilities to engage with Shakespeare’s language (Gibson, 1993; Banks, 2014;), and can transform negative attitudes into positive responses (Winston, 2015; Cassidy, 2016). Indeed, despite the many indications of negative attitudes and responses indicated above, there are multiple reports of student engagement and excitement relating to Shakespeare (Cassidy, 2016; RSC, 2016; Winston & Parvoti, 2017; *inter alia*), though they tend to all concentrate on the inclusion of active and rehearsal-based approaches. There are some accounts of deep engagement in literary criticism approaches (for example Baker, cited in Irish, 2008a) but it is noticeable that they are rarer.

## ***Risk***

Yet the literature indicates further influential characteristics within the Shakespeare classroom. Risk appears to be an important factor, for students and teachers alike. Galton referenced the ‘long history of research’ that shows that ‘many pupils ... are averse to risk taking’ (2010:9). Again, this appears to be a particular concern where drama is involved:

The making of relationships in drama ... often requires the taking of extraordinary risks for all involved. The teacher/leader is taking risks in seeking a shift in the normative power relations ... and by even moving back the desks in some cases. Young people must make themselves vulnerable and visible in order to participate (Monk *et al.*, 2011:79).

These views appear elsewhere (Moss, 2009; Irish, 2011). Irish argued that effective risk-taking is an essential, but often absent, feature of the Shakespeare classroom. She cited lack of training, alongside lack of support and trust from leadership and policy makers, as major contributory factors.

## ***Time***

There are clear indications that curriculum and assessment pressures result in 'limited time' to teach Shakespeare (Harris, 2003:41), with such observations occurring elsewhere (Irish, 2011). Several studies indicate that teachers focus on key scenes during KS3 and KS4, rather than teach a whole Shakespeare play (Coles, 2003; Goodwyn, 2012b). Furthermore, some suggest that time constraints force teachers to narrow their teaching, with active or rehearsal-based approaches often losing out as a result. For example, there appears to be a strong perception, even where it is reluctant, that such approaches are too time consuming; a luxury, at odds with assessment regimes and therefore 'abandoned' (Coles, *ibid.*:9) when it comes to preparing students for tests and exams, even by those who favour them. As highlighted earlier, many suggest these approaches require more time. Even Caldwell-Cook accepted that such approaches are 'not the easy way ... There is more hard work, even actual labour, attached to the Play Way schemes than there is in classroom "work"' (1919:209).

A 2013 RSC teacher case study offers a possible explanation, explaining that for these approaches to work, time must be spent 'creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence... Trying to "do" an active approach in isolation is not going to work. It disorients the students' (no page numbering). However, Irish argued this relates to initial familiarity; once secured these new ways of working can be 'very time-efficient' (2008b:7), a view supported by teachers and students alike. For example, year 10 students on an RSC summer school reported gaining a

‘detailed understanding of a new play in a very short space of time – much shorter than they had typically spent on their SATs text’ (*ibid.*).

### **2.2.9 Subject associations, networking and social media**

In England, there are two English subject associations: NATE (and its London affiliation, LATE), and the English Association. While the literature references the former there were no significant references to the latter. Marshall’s study of English teachers (2000b) highlighted the influence of LATE, alongside the English and Media Centre, whilst a later study by Yandell argued that ‘LATE continues to thrive’ (2014:407). Goodwyn suggested that during the 1950s to 1970s NATE ‘represented the cutting edge of thinking and of research’ (2012a:38). However, he conceded that both membership and influence have declined over the last twenty years, the result of ‘a deliberate marginalisation by governments and an attempt to characterise NATE as a left-wing, subversive agent’ (*ibid.*). Goodwyn referenced another contributory factor: the growing dominance of internet and online resources. In addition, physical meetings (such as TeachMeets) and social media are part of new but mostly under-researched networks. The extent to which these are a source of inspiration, ideas, support and therefore influence is currently unknown.

## **2.3 *Personal contexts***

### **2.3.1 Teacher identity**

As indicated in the previous chapter, Banks suggested a specific link between personal identity and the teaching of Shakespeare’s plays (2014). Yet hers is a rare voice in linking the personal and professional in the context of the teaching of Shakespeare. The wider literature suggests that personal identity is a strong

influence on teaching practice, ‘inextricably involved’ in classroom work (Salmon, 1995:11). Some have observed the way in which:

Teacher identity is shaped through a number of interacting contexts: government policies; accountability processes; national and local priorities ..., and a teacher’s own experience which forms their case knowledge (Bodman *et al.*, 2012:15).

Others highlight the deeply unique nature of these characteristics (Britzman, 1991), prompting some to stress the importance of teacher reflection on the impact of personal identity on teaching (Pollard, 2002).

### ***Gender and ethnicity***

Little in the literature relates Shakespeare to the gender or ethnicity of teachers rather than their students. Shah (2013) briefly alluded to her ethnicity and religion within the context of studying and teaching canonical literature, whilst Choudhury offered a rare analysis of being a Muslim teaching Shakespeare. Specifically referencing the significance of Islam in *Othello* she described how hard it is

for an Asian Muslim teacher, who is simultaneously trying not to be defined by religion and yet should not have to separate their teaching from their identity. A white teacher is neutral, whilst ‘others’ have been defined before they begin to teach (2007:198).

Others suggest that teacher identity relating to ethnicity is under-researched (Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014).

By comparison, there are multiple studies reflecting on teacher gender. Some indicate the disproportionate number of males in leadership positions, given the dominance of females within the profession as a whole (Thornton & Bricheno,

2000). Teaching in an all boys school, with predominantly male staff, particularly in leadership positions, one rare English teacher reflected on this phenomenon:

It is not unlikely that the boys have formed a perception of men as symbols of authority and leadership within the school. If so, how does this place the exclusively female English department in the perceptions of these students? What do female teachers represent? Motherhood, nurture, inspiration or even sexuality? (Wood, 2014:8).

Others point to gender differences whereby women appear less confident than their male colleagues (Kalaian & Freeman, 1994). Yet some suggest that attributing behaviour according to gender is problematic (Francis, 2008).

### ***Age – and agency***

International studies suggest profound global changes are likely to have shaped the identities of those interviewed as part of this research. For example, Leonard and Roberts have suggested that older teachers are more likely to see their role as political (2014). Indeed, there were in the past explicit calls for teaching to be a subversive activity (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). By contrast, Leonard and Roberts proposed that younger teachers are more likely to comply with actions defined by others. It is a theme picked up elsewhere, amidst suggestions of ‘a professional depoliticisation of teachers’, whereby ‘healthy educational debate—including the adoption of oppositional stances—is being eroded and replaced by an all-pervasive politics of compromise’ (Moore *et al.*, 2002:564). Some suggest a ‘culture of compliance’ (Alexander, 2008:2) whilst Goodwyn described a ‘passive conformity’ (2012a:50) specifically in relation to English teachers.

Jones referenced the work of Foucault<sup>7</sup>, arguing the latter’s insights into neoliberalism are coming to fruition, as teachers and students’ ‘capacities to

7 The influential French philosopher and social theorist (1926-1984).

think past the orthodoxies of reform ... are greatly reduced' (2013:335).

Alexander suggested a further consequence of the current political climate: 'it allows teachers to excuse or underplay their own agency and to blame government policy or resourcing levels for matters of which they have more control than they may be prepared to admit' (*ibid.*:17). This chimes with the influential educational theories underpinning the work of Archer around structure and agency. Her argument was that, as people, we can 'feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal, constraints' (1996:xxi). In this context it is worth briefly revisiting references already made to Free Schools<sup>8</sup> such as Michaela, where teachers appear to be exercising more agency and choice than state-controlled colleagues. Free Schools are both new and only tangentially relevant to my research; whether this agency continues remains to be seen. However, the extent to which teachers in my sample exercised agency, given reports of curriculum and assessment constraints, was an important area of exploration.

Looking specifically at experiences of Shakespeare and their relationship with age, there may be differences between teachers in England educated pre- and post-1988, since those in the latter category have been subject to the compulsory teaching of Shakespeare. In addition, changes within A-Levels and higher education mean would-be teachers have fewer opportunities to study Shakespeare post-16. Before 1980, those wanting to continue an academic engagement with English were limited to A-Level English Literature (Blake & Shortis, 2010). Since 1980 students have been able to pursue non-English subjects before choosing to become an English teacher. Similarly, at degree level there is now a proliferation of subjects available to potential English teachers,

8 Established initially by the Coalition government in 2010, Free Schools operate outside the control of local authorities and have a number of freedoms, for example around curriculum and employment of non-qualified teaching staff.

although Blake and Shortis suggested the majority of English trainee teachers had studied English Literature. However, Goodwyn reported that English degrees are ‘remarkably varied’ (2010b:21)<sup>9</sup>, though whether he meant in content or quality was unclear. The impact on Shakespeare was demonstrated by the concerns of some PGCE tutors who made ‘representations to their colleagues teaching English degrees about the level of representation of literary content (Shakespeare) in those curricula’ (Blake & Shortis, *ibid.*:98).

### ***Personal characteristics: motivation, passion, emotion and resilience***

A 2004 study suggested that a core motivation for 75% of secondary teachers was helping young people to learn, compared with 42% who wanted to stay involved with a subject specialism (Hobson *et al.*). Yet Goodwyn declared that 75% of English teachers were motivated by a love of reading (2002), a view echoed by Ellis (2003). A more recent study by Goodwyn again concluded that for many English teachers ‘literature has been the most formative element in their experience of the subject and the rationale for choosing to become a teacher’ (2010b:21). Referring specifically to Shakespeare, Coursen claimed that ‘we teach what we enjoy’ (1997:8) highlighting the importance of motivation. If Goodwyn is right, it suggests English teachers are more likely to promote a study of reading than, say, speaking and listening, drama or writing.

Passion, with its strong links to motivation and enjoyment, appears to be an important part of teacher identity. Hattie suggested ‘it infuses many of the influences that make the difference to the outcomes’ (2012:16). Given the status Hattie attributes to passion – or its antithesis – it is significantly under-researched within the teaching of Shakespeare. Elsewhere, Day and Leitch

9 According to *The Independent* content ranges from applied English; English Literature; English Language and creative language: <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/into-university/az-degrees/english-756186.html>.



highlighted the growing recognition of teaching ‘as work in which emotions are central’ (2001:407), reflecting ‘the immense emotional investment which many teachers make.’ (*ibid.*:412). Andy Hargreaves has extensively researched emotion, both positive and negative, coining the term ‘emotional geographies’ in order to analyse ‘forms of distance or closeness in people’s interactions or relationships’ (2001:1061). He argued that teaching and learning are not solely ‘concerned with knowledge, cognition, and skill. They are *emotional practices*’ (*ibid.*:1056, italics in the original), and that teaching is therefore ‘inextricably emotional – by design or default’ (*ibid.*:1057).

### **2.3.2 Life histories and experiences**

#### ***Home life and school***

Teachers’ personal experiences of Shakespeare within the family are under-documented (Olive, 2012b). By contrast, the influence on future teachers of their own experiences of school is both well-documented and, according to several well-established academics (for example Lortie, 1975; Flores and Day, 2006), profoundly influential. Britzman described the ‘years of observation’ (1991:3) that offers would-be teachers a level of familiarity with their future profession atypical of any other career. She summarised the impact of this experience, suggesting it ‘accounts for the persistency of particular worldviews’, and that, unintentionally, it informs the selection of ‘practices that are available in educational life’ (*ibid.*). Focusing specifically on English teachers, Ball argued that ‘the most profound influences upon the English teacher, in terms of his or her conception of English as a school subject and its concomitant pedagogy – is likely to be the teacher’s own experience as a pupil’ (1985:81). A more recent study echoed this, highlighting the likely influence of the ‘vivid character’ of their own English teacher: ‘... the one who inspired them and whose mentoring presence is still powerfully present’ (Goodwyn, 2002:73).

## ***The influence of location***

There is ‘evidence’ that ‘school socio-economic location and environment ... affect teachers and their working lives’ (Gu & Day, 2013:23). The influence of working within particular demographics has been explored in detail by Sammons *et al.* who suggested ‘The commitment and resilience of teachers in schools serving more disadvantaged communities are more persistently challenged than others’ (2007:699). Ng *et al.*, citing the wider literature, proposed that ‘teachers’ efficacy can increase in schools where students are performing well academically and teacher collegiality is high’ (2010:279). In these circumstances, teachers ‘are more willing to adopt a greater variety of innovative approaches ... while being less likely to blame themselves for poor student learning outcomes’ (*ibid.*).

Location may be a further influence within the specifics of teaching English, given the ‘two opposing paradigms’ (Davison, 2009:29) between the Cambridge School of F.R.Leavis, with its focus on ‘great literature’, and the London Day Training College<sup>10</sup>, focused more on language. Goodwyn suggested that the Cambridge School became associated with elitism and the grammar school movement, whereas London became more associated with emerging comprehensive education (2014). The suggestion that London, in particular, attracts or develops a different type of teacher, was picked up by Marshall. She described a category of English teachers as ‘critical dissenters’, who were predominantly based in London (2000b). Marshall suggested ‘The baton of progressive education, where English is concerned,’ (*ibid.*:28) passed from the London School to LATE, which pre-dated its national, sister organisation, NATE. Furthermore, the English teachers surveyed by Marshall cited the London-based English and Media Centre as a strong influence, alongside the IoE and LATE. However, Marshall concluded there was limited evidence to suggest London was the critical factor. Yet Yandell referenced LATE, and its place within ITE courses

10 Also known as the London School, which became the Institute of Education (IoE).

at London's IoE (2014), suggesting its ongoing influence for those training or teaching in London. Furthermore, London has cropped up in more recent literature (Hutchings, 2014; Rolph, 2017), due to the increased performance of London schools versus those with similar demographics. The London Challenge<sup>11</sup> may have been a contributory factor but others have suggested an influx of students 'from aspirational ethnic minority families' may play a part (Weale, 2015).

### ***Personal and professional relationships***

A number of studies suggest that personal and professional relationships play a critical part in shaping a teacher's identity and practice, with senior leaders and colleagues marked out as particularly influential (Day *et al.*, 2006; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008; Sammons *et al.*, 2011). Yet some previously influential relationships appear to be waning. Prior to changes in teacher education, universities played a key role in influencing teachers. However, more than twenty years ago Salmon observed '... in removing teacher training from institutes of higher education, the government intends to eliminate the influence of critical ideas' (1995:35). Others, such as Furlong (2005) and MacBeath (2011), suggest a marginalising or silencing of voices that might otherwise have influenced educational policy and practice. Jones went as far as to suggest that under the Coalition government 'The flow of practice between state institutions and other kinds of educational site has been cut off' (2013:335).

11 An initiative that ran from 2003 to 2011, initially aimed at improving London's secondary schools but extended to include primary schools.

### 2.3.3 Personal philosophies

Many studies suggest the influence and tenacity of belief systems that pre-date ITE (Claxton, 1984; Bramald *et al*, 1995; Levin, 2013). Elsewhere these belief systems are referred to as personal philosophies (for example, Marshall, 2000a). According to Claxton, all those training as teachers ‘have a personal theory about education, schools, children, teaching and learning’ which is their own

intuitive, largely tacit, largely unexamined set of beliefs, attitudes and values that are variously idiosyncratic, partial, simplistic, archaic and rigid and which they have unconsciously taken as being necessary and/or desirable (*ibid.*:169).

The consequence is, according to Claxton, profound: ‘Because of their *investment* in this theory ... they are loath to give it up and yet it will not serve them well. What people believe is much more important than what they “know”’ (*ibid.* italics in original). This is therefore both an important, and problematic, influence, and links back to a number of considerations explored above, particularly around responses to evidence. For example, Levin argued that, because ‘everyone’ has attended school, they feel ‘a level of expertise about the education system’. As a result ‘People may then be less open to research evidence where it conflicts with their prior experience’ (2013:10).

## 2.4 Conclusion

Throughout the literature what emerges is quite how many tensions and ‘ferocious’ disagreements (Husbands, 2012:176) influence the socio-political context of the contemporary English classroom. These appear exacerbated in the Shakespeare classroom where ‘a great many different interests – political, commercial, pedagogic and media-led – are at work shaping the way Shakespeare is used in schools’ (Bottoms, 2013:109). Disagreements appear both

philosophically profound and politically motivated. It quickly becomes apparent that the Shakespeare classroom is not only a volatile crucible of opposing views on education, English as a subject, and Shakespeare, but also appears to be a highly political vehicle for promoting 'traditional' British values. A number of writers (Jones, 1992; Davison & Dowson, 2009) concur with the view of English as more political than any other subject. At the heart of the English curriculum is Shakespeare, unwittingly associated with notions of universal truths and great literature set against perceptions of elitism, oppression, symbolic violence and cultural hegemony. Further tensions exist around heritage, entitlement and cultural production versus cultural analysis, cultural reproduction and cultural materialism.

The professional context is equally complex. Arguments about traditional versus progressive or alternative pedagogies reflect fundamental differences of opinion about the purpose of education, the role of the teacher and how young people learn. Research and evidence is contested. Little of the existing literature, however, focuses specifically on Shakespeare, and the effect of socio-political contexts on practice. Even more limited is research into the personal life histories, experiences and philosophies of the Shakespeare teacher, and the relationship of these to socio-political and professional contexts. It is these gaps in the literature that this research hoped to address.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The fit of phenomenology with my research rested on multiple considerations. In particular, hermeneutic phenomenology includes a strong focus on characteristics such as language, the influence of socio-historical and cultural contexts on both participant and researcher, and the nature of embodied learning. All of these resonated deeply with the themes emerging from the literature. This chapter therefore briefly summarises hermeneutic phenomenology, and its relevance here. It explores interviews and thematic data analysis as most commonly referenced. It addresses ethical considerations, alongside the advantages and limitations of methodology and methods. Hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to counter limitations (and in some instances rejects them entirely) in a number of ways. In particular, it emphasises the need for transparency around researcher positionality, coupled with researcher reflexivity, all of which are explored in more detail below. The penultimate section contains specific details of the stages I went through in applying thematic data analysis to the interview transcripts. The chapter concludes with brief pen portraits of those I interviewed.

### ***3.1 Ontology and epistemology***

Many (for example, Sikes, 2004; Punch, 2009) have highlighted the importance of researchers reflecting on values and beliefs at the start of a research project. According to Punch, this ensures that advantages of any position are maximised and disadvantages minimised. Sikes suggested that ontological views are divided into two, between a belief that the social world is independent and external, or 'socially constructed, subjectively experienced and the result of human thought as expressed through language' (2004:20). I tend to position myself more within the second category, along with its strong associations with qualitative inquiry, and a constructivist epistemology based on a belief that:

Truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world. Meaning is *constructed* not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Gray, 2009:17, italics in original).

My starting position was a belief that participants in my research would come with their own unique experiences of teaching of Shakespeare. Furthermore, my research was driven by a motivation to understand teachers and to hear their voices. As the literature highlighted, the status and socio-political implications of Shakespeare in England's education system has had profound influences on individual English teachers. It was important to me that my research offered an albeit small opportunity to counter-balance the power relationships between the English teacher and the socio-political contexts within which they teach. Qualitative research was therefore attractive because it possesses an 'inclusionary nature and ability to give service-users a voice' (Jones, 2004:97).

### ***3.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology as methodology***

Before making final decisions, I considered other possible methodologies. Within qualitative research such as mine, ethnography and case studies were potential candidates. Yet they appeared less relevant than phenomenology in terms of the aims of my research and the gaps within the literature. For example, of the limited range of empirical studies into the teaching of Shakespeare most have been classroom-based case studies (for example, Coles, 2009, 2013b; Yandell, 1997; Bellamy, 2005). Whilst offering important insights, they did not provide a depth of analysis of teachers' *experiences* across multiple sites. An early reflection confirmed my doubts about ethnographic case studies for this thesis. I had

adopted the role of participant observer during a teacher training day and my field notes highlight the limitations of this methodology here:

I'm becoming frustrated – the observations don't feel as if they're revealing anything new... I want to talk to people: I want to ask them for their responses to the work, to dig beneath what they're saying. But the INSET sessions don't allow time and space for that (Evans, 2013).

This ultimately led me to phenomenology as a methodology suited to 'describing the common meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon' (Creswell, 2012:76, italics in the original), and to hermeneutics. Gray (2009) defined the latter as the belief that social reality is too complex to be understood through observation and that instead, the social scientist must rely on interpretation, a view supported by Hammersley who claimed that research 'necessarily relies on judgment (sic) and interpretation' (2005:89).

### **3.2.1 Phenomenology as philosophy**

Phenomenology can refer to both philosophical beliefs and research methodologies. There are further critical variations in the epistemological and ontological views that underpin its different branches, stretching from positivism to interpretivism, with agreement about the *what* of phenomenology but not the *how* (Finlay (2012). Once applied to methodology, these views ultimately lead to significant differences around position of the researcher, data analysis and issues of rigour and credibility (Dowling, 2007). Understanding these differences and their implications was an important step in choosing the most appropriate branch of phenomenology for my research. I have included only a brief overview; others (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Groenewald, 2004) have provided useful and succinct summaries of the sometimes complex history of phenomenology, its



development as philosophy and methodology, and the tensions or differences that led to different ‘schools’ of phenomenology.

### ***The phenomenology of Husserl***

Many (Groenewald, 2004, Cohen *et al.*, 2011) have credited the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) as the founder of phenomenology.

Husserl was particularly concerned with capturing the ‘essence’ of things, with a focus on critically re-evaluating every day ‘phenomena’, looking with fresh eyes and questioning assumptions and ‘taken-for-granted’ attitudes. According to Cohen *et al.*, Husserl’s

catchphrase was ‘back to the things!’ which for him meant finding out how things appear directly to us rather than through the media of cultural and symbolic structures. In other words, we are asked to look beyond the details of everyday life to the essences underlying them (*ibid.*:8).

This description highlights some of the benefits of phenomenology for a study of Shakespeare. The literature indicated the heavy influence on individuals and wider society of a complex web of cultural, historic, political and social considerations around the teaching of Shakespeare. As individuals, we are likely to see Shakespeare through a prism of our own experiences alongside Husserl’s suggestion of a ‘media of cultural and symbolic structures’. The professional responsibility of teaching Shakespeare adds further layers of complexity. Phenomenology offered opportunities to look with fresh eyes at how and why Shakespeare’s plays are taught, to strip away some of the inbuilt assumptions in order to question and analyse English teachers’ motivations and experiences.

The means by which we might go ‘back to the things’ is the key distinguishing feature of Husserl’s phenomenology. Husserl believed that the phenomenologist should (and presumably could) put aside, or ‘bracket’ their personal experiences

in order to capture the essence of ‘the thing’, a process he called ‘epoché’. This is one of the key divisive areas that significantly differentiates branches of phenomenology (Dowling, 2007). Those following Husserl attempt to bracket their experiences through a process of reduction which attempts to make the researcher as non-influential and neutral as possible (Finlay, 2012). However, as explored in more detail below, others dispute how much one can bracket personal experiences, rejecting positivist attempts to make phenomenology more scientific. Finally, it is noteworthy that Husserl was concerned with notions of intentionality, influenced by Cartesian assumptions of a mind/body split (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). As referenced in the literature, these assumptions dominate education policy and practice in England, despite being disputed.

### ***Existential phenomenology and the work of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty***

A number of twentieth century philosophers, including the French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), were critical not only of Husserl’s notion of bracketing but also his stance on the mind/body split. These existential phenomenologists took the notion of understanding the lived experience, the ‘lifeworld’, which originated with Husserl, but adapted it and made it central to their branch of philosophy (King & Horrocks, 2010). The *way* in which people experience their lifeworlds is central to existential phenomenology. For example, Merleau-Ponty’s views on ‘embodiment’, summarised by King and Horrocks, highlight differences from Husserl: ‘We experience our lifeworld as embodied things – not *with* our bodies, as if they were tools used by but separate from our minds (the Cartesian Dualist view), but *through* our bodies’ (*ibid.*:179). King and Horrocks argued that the focus on embodied engagement is a neglected but key contribution of phenomenology to social science research. It offers a tantalising point of connection with embodied

approaches to Shakespeare, and highlights the relevance to pedagogy of philosophical arguments about mind/body splits versus embodied understanding.

The work of Sartre extended existential phenomenology in two other ways that are of particular relevance here. Firstly, Sartre stressed ‘the developmental, processual aspect of human being believing that ‘we are always becoming ourselves’ (Smith *et al.*, 2009:19). An implication of this notion is that individuals have freedom of choice although, according to Smith *et al.* (*ibid.*), Sartre acknowledged the inherent complexities since this freedom is bounded by one’s personal, social and historical contexts. This was a useful concept for my research: what choices did those in my sample exercise and to what extent were those choices encouraged or suppressed by their circumstances?

Sartre offered a second valuable consideration with respect to absence. Smith *et al.* suggested that, for Sartre, ‘things that are absent are as important as those that are present in defining who we are and how we see the world’ (*ibid.*). Whilst Sartre inevitably explored this from a philosophical perspective, it throws the spotlight on an important but problematic consideration that I faced throughout the process of data collection and analysis: what was absent, why, and what was the implication? A recurring theme in my analysis was the way participants articulated visions for education that echoed their own experiences. Yet experiences they *did not have* might have been equally influential in shaping ideas and practices. This concept of absence led to a particular and important focus during data analysis.

### ***Heidegger and interpretive phenomenology***

For some phenomenologists (in particular Giorgi, a follower of Husserl) ‘the operative word in phenomenological research is “describe”’ (Groenewald, 2004:5). Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), initially a close associate of Husserl’s, developed

his own version of phenomenology, which kept the emphasis on description but added interpretation as equally important. Heidegger believed that ‘we live in an *interpreted world* and are ourselves *hermeneutic*; we are interpreters and understanders’ (Ashworth, 2003:20, italics in the original). He questioned whether it is ever possible to have knowledge without interpretation (Smith *et al.*, 2009). It is this focus on the nature and role of interpretation that was partly responsible for the split between Husserl and Heidegger, and led to distinctive differences and disagreements within phenomenology.

Underpinning Heidegger’s views on interpretation are the ‘inextricably intertwined’ (Koch, 1995:831) concepts of historicity and the hermeneutic circle. Koch provided a useful analysis of the ideas that are central to these concepts, namely ‘background’, ‘pre-understanding’ and ‘co-constitution’, all of which have resonance here. She summarised background as a person’s history, the culture they inherit at birth, informing their understanding and determining what is ‘real’ for them, yet not, according to Heidegger, capable of becoming completely explicit. For Heidegger, pre-understanding was linked to background since

Human beings always come to a situation with a story or a pre-understanding. These stories are already within our common background understanding ... Pre-understanding is ... not something we can eliminate, or bracket, it is already with us in the world (*ibid.*:831).

Finally, Heidegger believed in co-constitutionality, the philosophical assumption whereby a person is both shaped by, yet themselves shape, the world around them. The consequence of this line of thinking is a belief that individuals are inseparable from their social and historical context, their historicity (sometimes referred to as historicity). This brings us back to Heidegger’s views on interpretation, that ‘every encounter involves an interpretation influenced by an individual’s background or historicity’ (Lavery, 2008:24). Lavery claimed that,

for Heidegger, being human means to interpret, themes analysed in more detail in his 1927 book *Being and Time*, with its focus on 'Dasein', translated as 'the mode of being human' (*ibid.*).

All these views have profound implications for both the subject of research, and the researcher. For example, the double hermeneutic is a concept that acknowledges complex layers of contextual influences and interpretation. Meaning is co-constructed through interactions involving both (hence the double) research participant and researcher. For Heidegger, awareness of, and accounting for, these layers of interpretation were crucial, and underpinned his views on the concept of the hermeneutic circle. Koch described this as a 'metaphor taken from Heidegger to describe the experience of moving dialectically between the part and the whole' (1996:176). The hermeneutic circle acts as constant reminder to the researcher to remain alert and reflexive, to interpret experiences whilst at the same time questioning how they came about (Lavery, 2008).

### ***The work of Gadamer and Ricoeur***

Two other phenomenologists were central to the development of hermeneutic phenomenology, both as philosophy and methodology. The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) was heavily influenced by Heidegger, sharing a focus on the inextricable connection between experience as it is understood and interpreted through language (Lavery, 2008). Language is not only a means by which research participants communicate their experiences, it develops understanding *through* interpretation. Furthermore, since interpretation is affected by historicity, it is a dynamic, evolving process, subject to change as contextual circumstances alter. The logical conclusion for Gadamer was the impossibility of a fixed, definitive interpretation (Lavery, *ibid.*).

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) was credited by Tan *et al.* as cementing the connection between hermeneutics and phenomenology (2009). Ricoeur believed that language is inextricably bound up in a mutual dependency of meaning and experience:

Experience [not only] can be said, it demands to be said. To bring it to language is not to change it into something else but, in articulating and developing it, to make it become itself (cited in Henriksson & Friesen, 2012:3).

Central to Ricoeur's take on hermeneutics and phenomenology was his description and analysis of written discourse as text<sup>12</sup>. Tan *et al.* offered a detailed critique of this theory, including Ricoeur's concept of distancing, 'a standing separate from or being objective in relation to the text' (2009:7). Ricoeur's work highlights the fundamental change that occurs when discourse is captured in writing. Focusing specifically on the nature of interview transcripts Ricoeur argued that the historicity of an interview means that discourse can never be fully preserved without alteration. This serves as an important reminder of the instability of interview transcripts as accurate records of a participant's experience when viewed at a distance by the ultimate research audience.

### **3.2.2 Phenomenology as methodology**

Unsurprisingly, given the continued influence of the paradigmatically opposed beliefs of Husserl and Heidegger, phenomenology as methodology has as many variations, complexities and disagreements as its philosophical counterpart (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2012). There are key areas of agreement, such as the focus on understanding the lived experience, data collection methods, and subject selection (Lavery, 2008). However, tensions around how to analyse data and

<sup>12</sup> Within phenomenology the term 'text' also refers to verbal communication, visual arts and music (Lavery, 2008).

communicate findings, particularly around interpretation and the language used, have led to disagreements over phenomenology as science or art (Finlay, 2012). Some followers of Husserl maintain an exclusive focus on phenomenological research as pure description, rejecting hermeneutic phenomenology because of its inclusion of interpretation (Dowling, 2004). To add to the confusion, the terms phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology are often used interchangeably (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Lavery 2008). A more detailed study is therefore necessary to highlight both subtle and extreme differences in definitions and practice that affect phenomenology as methodology.

### ***The Husserlian branches of phenomenology as methodology***

The phenomenologists and approaches described above were rooted primarily in philosophy. The Austrian social scientist Alfred Schütz (1899-1959) first applied phenomenology to sociology in an attempt to relate Husserl's ideas 'to the scientific study of social behaviour' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:18). The emphasis on scientific study is important, reflecting Husserl's epistemological and ontological views. The American psychologist Amedeo Giorgi became a key proponent of Husserlian derived phenomenology, with its focus on thorough description, providing the impetus for what is known of as the Duquesne approach or tradition (Finlay, 2012). Along with his wife Barbro, he has been keen to position qualitative research on a par with approaches used in the natural sciences (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Their concern has been that 'because phenomenology deals with experiences and meanings, its scientific status is often suspect'. Their aim was to create procedures within phenomenological research that 'can follow the general dictates of science' (*ibid.*:27). Finlay summarised Giorgi's framework, which focuses on phenomenological reduction, description, and the search for essences (2012). Giorgi has been deeply critical of more interpretive branches of phenomenology (2006) and has, in return, attracted criticisms from social scientists drawn to a Heidegger-influenced approach (Dowling, 2004).



## ***Heideggerian branches of phenomenology as methodology***

Phenomenological methodologies that focus on interpretation *alongside* description stem from Heidegger's branch of phenomenological philosophy, further influenced by the likes of Gadamer and Ricoeur. In addition, the work of Max van Manen (b.1942) has been central to the development of interpretative phenomenology within the social sciences. Its particular focus on pedagogy and educational research provided added relevance here. Born in the Netherlands before emigrating to Canada, van Manen became associated with what is known as the Dutch or Utrecht school of phenomenology. In his seminal 1990 book *Researching lived experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*, van Manen offered a contrast to the positivist and behavioural empirical sciences typified by Husserl and Giorgi. Applied as a methodology, van Manen's take on hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the transformation into disciplinary understanding of personal meanings and experiences captured in interview texts (Thomé *et al.*, 2004).

### ***3.3 Methods***

A constant throughout the literature on phenomenology is the absence of strict guidelines on methods. Henriksson and Friesen went as far as to suggest that 'the method of phenomenology is that there is no method' (2012:12).

Furthermore, there is a strong commitment to reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of phenomenology (Lavery, 2008). This view was echoed by Finlay (2012) who emphasised the need for a multiplicity of methods given the multiplicity of appearances and meanings. A consequence is that hermeneutic phenomenology poses particular challenges in terms of rigour and credibility (Lavery, 2008; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007), analysed below. Finally, the absence of specific guidelines has been acknowledged as problematic for the novice researcher (Groenewald,



2004; Finlay, 2012). What are available are frequent suggestions or exemplifications of researchers' own unique approaches informed, rather than bound, by phenomenology or hermeneutic phenomenology (for example, Groenewald, 2004; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Thomé *et al.*, 2004). I used these as constant reference points, explored in the last section of this chapter.

### ***Piloting and pilot study***

Before making final decisions about methods I followed Muijs' advice that 'The single most effective strategy to minimise problems is to make sure you *pilot* your instruments' (2012b:153, italics in the original). Piloting typically means one of two things: a type of 'feasibility study' or the 'pre-testing of a particular research instrument' (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001:1). Within the course of my research I employed both. Firstly, I conducted what Yin described as 'an exploratory case study ... whose purpose is to identify the research questions or procedures to be used in a subsequent research study' (2013:238). The focus of my pilot study was a cohort of teachers being trained through the RSC's LPN. For eleven months I immersed myself in the training, development and experiences of three primary teachers; one primary head; and fifteen secondary (mostly English and drama) teachers.

The pilot study served multiple purposes. Firstly, it helped shape my research question. Conducting a pilot study in parallel with researching the literature meant immersion in both theory and practice, and sharpened my awareness of gaps in both. Secondly, it played a key role in ultimate choice of methodology and methods. As already indicated, I explored ethnography and case studies as possible methodologies whilst conducting my pilot study, and used a survey and interviews as research methods. Whilst the first three felt unsatisfactory in progressing my understanding of teachers' experiences, interviews presented me with the most useful findings. Finally, the pilot provided me with valuable

experience in managing interviews, whilst contributing a small amount of additional data<sup>13</sup>.

### **3.3.1 Interviews as chosen method**

Interviews are by far the dominant data collection method within phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014). Furthermore, Day and Leitch suggested that the experience of teaching, so central to my research, can only be ‘truly known through stories of real events’ (2001:407). Kvale pointed to the growing popularity of interviews as a ‘sensitive and powerful method for investigating subjects’ private and public lives’ (2006:480). van Manen (1990) identified a number of roles that interviews could play within hermeneutical phenomenology (such as ethnographical, psychological), before focusing on what he described as ‘conversational interviewing’ which he suggested serves two purposes. Firstly it explores and gathers ‘experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon’ (*ibid.*:66). Secondly, the interview can be used as a ‘vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience’ (*ibid.*). Both these purposes reflected my aspiration not only to understand how English teachers experienced the teaching of Shakespeare, but what that experience meant for them and their students.

#### ***Choosing structural types of interview***

Dowling (2007) and Bevan (2014) both highlighted lack of guidance on types of interviews for hermeneutical phenomenological research. Bevan suggested that phenomenological researchers simply refer to wider guidance on interviewing within qualitative research. Hobson and Townsend (2010) provided a useful summary and analysis of interview typologies, typically characterised under

13 Given the inclusion of non-English teachers the additional data was very limited, and mostly related to one interview with ‘Thomas’, a secondary English teacher, and some survey findings.

three broad headings: structured or formal; semi- or part-structured; and open or informal. Structured or formal interviews are heavily directed by the interviewer. There are pre-established questions, the wording and order of which are repeated exactly with each participant. These types of questions are more closely aligned with quantitative methodology, perceived as they are as having stronger opportunities to test reliability (explored below). Ziebland and McPherson proposed drawbacks to structured interviews, 'where the respondent is yanked back to the researcher's agenda every time they attempt to add their own embellishments or diversions' (2006:407). Alternatively, open or informal interviews, which tend to be more closely associated with qualitative methodology, attempt to 'resemble everyday conversations' (Hobson & Townsend, 2010:224).

Hobson and Townsend viewed distinctions between structured and unstructured interviews as simplistic, exaggerated and unsatisfactory (*ibid.*). They suggested structured interviews can still have open-ended questions whilst unstructured interviews still have agendas and implicit assumptions from both interviewer and interviewee. They proposed that most interviews actually fall into the category of semi-structured, which enable researchers to achieve breadth and depth in their datasets. According to Coleman (2012), this structure is most suited to those (like me) who are working within an interpretive paradigm. Furthermore, van Manen's description of conversational interviews within hermeneutic phenomenology most closely matched how others described semi-structured interviews, so offered the best balance between focused questions driven by the research questions, and opportunities to unearth and explore unexpected insights.

## ***Sample size, recruitment and sampling***

A National Centre for Research Methods' review captured various views on sample size (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Some suggested sample sizes of one could be appropriate for qualitative research. Elsewhere Kvale highlighted the strategy of interviewing until one reaches 'saturation', where no further insights are offered by new participants (2007). Gray (2009) suggested eight participants should be sufficient; King and Horrocks (2010) emphasised securing diversity as the foremost criterion. Given the range of personal characteristics and teaching experiences that I wanted to include in my sample (explained below) my original aim was to recruit ten English teachers, anticipating possible attrition.

My recruitment strategy involved advertising via a call out (Appendix B) through the email lists of NATE and the RSC, alongside my own personal networks. Mindful of King and Horrocks' warning (2010) that recruiting participants through advertising results in a sample that is highly self-selecting, I aimed to use a purposive approach to sampling. A common strategy within qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), it means 'sampling in a deliberate way' (Punch & Oancea, 2014:210). The researcher selects from within a wider group of respondents based on criteria that best reflect the diversity of a chosen group. My selection criteria aimed to secure a broadly representative sample of English teachers, using the DfE's 2012 workforce census (published 2013) as guide for age, gender and ethnicity. Based on this, my ideal sample would have been seven females and three males; three under 30; five aged 30-49; two over 50; nine White-British and one ethnic minority. I also wanted to achieve a diversity of experiences that might be relevant to teaching, and specifically the teaching of Shakespeare, such as school demographic, location, length of teaching career, and familiarity with RSC or other active and rehearsal-based approaches. I therefore created a criteria checklist (Appendix C) to select purposefully from those who responded to my recruitment strategy.

In reality, I never had enough respondents to apply purposive sampling. As at May 2014, when I started interviews, I had six participants and no option but to proceed with what essentially had become a convenience sample, ‘involving the selection of the most accessible subjects’ (Marshall, 1996:523). Aware of the criticisms of convenience sampling as least rigorous (Marshall, *ibid.*), I continued to seek further participants using purposive measures to address under-representation in my initial sample. By the end of 2014 I finally secured a purposively selected sample of nine participants. However, I failed to secure second interviews with two of the nine. One, Mary, withdrew after the first interview, a choice made clear to her through the consent sheet (see Appendix D). With Ayesha, I made several frustrated attempts to secure a second interview. Ultimately, for both ethical and practical reasons, I had to proceed with only her first interview.

### ***Number, length and type of interviews***

In the absence of detailed guidance I adopted recommendations reflected elsewhere (Bevan, 2014) to conduct more than one interview with each participant. My pilot study indicated that 30 to 40 minute interviews often felt rushed. I therefore asked for an hour and fifteen minutes for the first interview and an hour for the second. One participant kindly made herself available for a third short interview of 20 minutes. Whilst providing the opportunity for further clarification, it revealed fewer insights, suggesting I had reached saturation.

Holt referenced the general assumption that face-to-face interviews are most appropriate for capturing narrative data, with telephone interviews as ‘second-best’, partly because of the lack of ethnographic information that can be captured (2010). Yet research comparing telephone interviewing with face-to-face suggested either no difference in quality of data (for example Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), or important benefits. Holt, for example, wrote of the ‘richer

text’ that emerged from telephone interviewing, which she ascribed to the need for both interviewer and participant to articulate ‘everything’, because of the lack of non-verbal communication (*ibid.*:116). King and Horrocks also challenged the notion that telephone interviews are a ‘pragmatic second choice’ (2010:81).

Emerging literature (for example, Opdenakker, 2006; Kazmer & Xie, 2008) on newer alternatives has examined the pros and cons of interviews via email, Skype, instant messaging and chat rooms. Kazmer and Xie claimed that the most important consideration is that ‘participants and interviewer are comfortable in the interaction mode’, and recommended that ‘one should let the participants choose as much as possible’ (*ibid.*:274). I therefore offered my participants the choice of telephone or Skype and, where geographically possible, face-to-face. Only one participant chose Skype; ultimately, however, this was rescheduled as face-to-face. Finally, location for face-to-face interviews needed to be considered; again, I was guided by participant choice. Details are summarised in the following table.

*Table 1: Interview dates, duration and location*

Alias	Interview 1: date, time, location			Interview 2: date, time, location			Interview 3: date, time, location			Total
Thomas	28/3/13	30m	Phone							30m
Caro	22/05/14	1h15m	Cafe	11/11/14	1h 5m	Phone				2h20m
Fiona	06/06/14	1h15m	Phone	20/11/14	1h 0m	Phone				2h15m
Brishti	10/06/14	1h 5m	Cafe	10/10/14	1h 0m	Phone	24/11/14	20m	Phone	2h25m
Sean	12/06/14	1h15m	School	18/11/14	56m	Phone				2h10m
Dawn	24/06/14	1h15m	Phone	10/10/14	1h15m	Phone				2h30m
Mary	25/06/14	1h30m	Arts centre	Withdrew						1h30m
Hugh	09/12/14	1h 0m	Phone	27/01/15	35m	Phone				1h35m
Gina	12/12/14	57m	Phone	28/01/15	48m	Phone				1h45m
Ayesha	14/01/15	1h 0m	School	Couldn't secure second interview						1h 0m
Total										18h 0m

In the analysis chapters, I refer to individual interviews. Seven of those interviewed during the main research were interviewed twice or, as with Brishti, three times. I use their initial and the interview number, for example B3 to represent Brishti's third interview. Ayesha, Mary and Thomas were only interviewed once. There was therefore no need to identify their particular interview. References to specific interviews are not repeated in the final two chapters since they merely repeat what has already been established.

### **3.3.2 Designing my interview schedule**

An interview schedule must be driven by the research question (Drever, 2003, *inter alia*). King and Horrocks suggested three main sources for identifying topics: personal experience, research literature and preliminary work (2010). The literature, previous RSC research, and the pilot study all highlighted some areas for exploration, for example personal identity and teaching approaches. These acted as initial topic guides, which I aimed to divide between two interviews. The schedule for the latter was inevitably more flexible, with a key purpose being to clarify responses emerging during first interviews. This meant allowing time for clarification, and flexibility to craft questions often unique to each participant. I then considered individual questions. A core consideration was minimising the way my choice of questions and individual words might unduly influence responses. Again, phenomenology was helpful, prompting the need to consider the teaching of Shakespeare with fresh ideas. In practice, I found it helpful to ask teachers to describe some experiences as if I was a fly on the wall (see section two, question 1 in Appendix F), in order to avoid both parties taking for granted my prior experiences.

In terms of sequence, guidance suggested an initial broad, open question to build rapport and help participants feel comfortable with the interviewing process. For example, Bevan advocated 'contextualising questioning' within phenomenological



interviewing, to enable participants to ‘reconstruct and describe his or her experience as a form of narrative that will be full of significant information’ (2014:139). Thus my first question asked my interviewees to narrate and reconstruct their early experiences of Shakespeare. The remaining sequence saw more complex questions asked later in the interview, when participants might feel more comfortable. In the first interview, I saved two particular types of question until towards the end. The first was a ‘what if’ imagination exercise, divided into three different questions. This set of questions has strong resonances with Bevan’s description of ‘imaginative variation’. Their purpose is to ask questions ‘in this manner because they aim to make the person identify invariants by describing how the experience would change’ (2014:142). My aim was to explore how and why the experience of teaching Shakespeare might change if my interviewees had greater power to influence policy and practice. Responses were often illuminating, as described within my findings. The final question was around the awareness and use of evidence. I deliberately left this till last, to discover whether or not the subject might occur unprompted; again, insights gained are considered in later chapters.

In the second interview I also explored what Stake described as ‘exhibit questions’, where the respondent is encouraged towards ‘sharper concentration by asking them to examine and respond to a specific statement, a story, an artefact, a quotation’ (2010:97). One area I particularly wanted to explore was whether or not English teachers agreed with some academics who suggested that active and rehearsal-based approaches might be appropriate with younger students, but lacked sufficient intellectual rigour to justify their use with older students. I therefore provided a quote from McLuskie (fourth section, question 2 in Appendix G), and encouraged responses. Unlike Stake, however, I felt less satisfied with the answers generated by this exhibit question. It felt too leading,



and prompted one or two responses which suggested confusion; increasingly I left it out.

### ***Language, prompts and probes***

Bevan commended the earlier advice of Benner to ask questions using ‘the vocabulary and language of the individual being interviewed’ (2014:137). As an ex-teacher, and an educator, it felt both appropriate and comfortable to talk using the language of key stages, curriculum and assessment. My instinct was to avoid the language of educational research; as previously stated, part of my purpose was to discover whether or not teachers were already familiar with, and using, terms such as evidence-based or evidence-informed approaches to teaching. The questions ultimately chosen are available in Appendices F, G and H, along with background questions asked (Appendix E) whilst sample pages from a transcript are provided in Appendix I. Alongside questions, prompts and probes were used where needed. Drever described the difference between them as follows:

Prompts are directed towards what they know but have not yet mentioned...

Probes are directed at what people have already said, asking them to clarify and explain, but not as a rule to justify or defend their position (2003:23).

I relied more on prompts in first interviews, with greater focus on clarification and probing in the second.

## ***3.4 Ethical issues***

Ethical considerations permeate all aspects of the research process, through to writing up and dissemination (Wellington, 2015), and tend to focus on the well-established principles of informed consent, openness and disclosure, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2011). Others have

highlighted further principles, such as the oft-cited principle of ‘do no harm’ (for example, Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I therefore gave careful consideration to the matter of informed consent. The call out for participants gave basic information about my research (Appendix B); more detail was provided for those who expressed an interest in participating, along with a consent sheet (Appendix D). I revisited consent at the beginning of each interview, when I stressed the right to withdraw at any point. Anonymity was addressed through changing names and obscuring finer details that might identify participants’ schools or other personal data. I offered, and maintained, high levels of confidentiality, particularly important as some of my participants were known to the RSC. Finally, throughout my research I strove to ensure researcher competency, developing my research skills through extensive reading, attending conferences and training courses. There were additional ethical issues, such as the complex power relations within interviews that some (for example, Kvale, 2007) have highlighted. Duncombe and Jessop wrote a chapter entitled ‘*Doing rapport*’ and *the ethics of ‘faking friendship’*, describing their discomfort that even ‘outwardly friendly’ and ‘feminist interviewing’ were driven by the ‘instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research, and also (hopefully) for our future careers.’ (2002:109). This is the double-edged sword of interviewing; whilst there are no easy answers, I attempted to remain sensitive to this issue throughout inter2viewing and writing up.

### **3.5 *Limitations***

Criticisms of qualitative research due to perceptions of methodological limitations abound, focusing on issues of reliability, validity, generalisability, and researcher positionality. These issues are a point of continued tension between quantitative and qualitative researchers (Bush, 2012; Diefenbach, 2008). However, others (Hammersley, 2004; Jones, 2004) have rejected these criticisms,

which they see as positivist and antithetical to the nature and values of qualitative research. Yet Diefenbach's assertion that qualitative research and social sciences are 'more vulnerable... [to] the possible downsides of subjectivity' (ibid.:877) is worth considering. Alongside others, Diefenbach has critiqued many accusations levelled against qualitative research, whilst at the same time proposing alternatives to methodological concepts of reliability, validity, generalisability. I therefore considered limitations and criticisms, alongside strategies for overcoming them.

Some (Morrison, 2012; Gray, 2009) have emphasised the fallibility of human beings reporting on their views and experiences. For example, participants may be unable to remember past experiences with accuracy. They may attempt to create a retrospective narrative that makes sense of what might otherwise be random experiences, or succumb to what is known as the 'social desirability problem', where participants give 'socially approved answers' (Gray, 2009:104) in the belief that they are being helpful, or that these answers will present them as they want to appear, rather than who they really are. Morrison emphasised other considerations, including that most people do not regularly reflect on their behaviour, and the very act of doing so taints the research process. Furthermore, she highlighted ways in which research participants might be unaware of the broader structures that govern the interpretations they give or of the conditions that underpin their actions (*ibid.*). This last observation has strong links with the literature, which suggests that teachers are conditioned and shaped by the social, political and cultural contexts within which they live. Yet it was one of the reasons I chose hermeneutic phenomenology, with its particular focus on historicity as a constant reminder of the influence of context.

Regarding interviews, King and Horrocks highlighted that it is too easy to view qualitative interviews as 'an uncomplicated exchange of ideas and opinions ... [with an] assumption ... that accurate information is there to be discovered'

(2010:17). The reality is that interviews are complex research methods, with significant limitations and pitfalls, particularly for the novice researcher. Cohen *et al.* cited the earlier work of Cicourel (1964) who identified a number of ‘unavoidable features of the interview situation’ (2011:410). These include different contextual factors for individual interviews, and participant avoidance tactics if questioning is too deep. Even without issues around human fallibility, explored next, these observations undermine the notion that interviews might generate ‘accurate information’ (King & Horrocks, 2010:17). This acted as a reminder that whilst an interviewer can state as fact that a participant said something, they cannot state that what they said was true, or that the researcher fully understood the intended meaning.

Cohen *et al.* took this further, arguing that the interview is not a simple arena for information exchange but a social encounter (2011), a view corroborated by King and Horrocks. They described interviews as a co-construction of meaning between interviewer and interviewee:

Using language, they [participants] have the chance to author their experiences into particular versions of events. Yet those versions of events do not pre-exist the interview. Rather, through shared meanings they are co-constructed within the interview situation (*ibid.*:134).

This resonated with hermeneutic phenomenology, which acknowledges the co-constructive and interpretive role of the participants, who work ‘together to bring life to the experience being explored’ (Laverty, 2008:30). Bevan recognised that respondents are ‘real, active, and interpreting, and will intend to find meaning in experience – including the research interview’ (2014:137). The same is true of the interviewer; hermeneutic phenomenology prompts constant consideration of interpretation and co-construction of meanings, the double hermeneutic. One way of addressing these limitations is to gain experience in crafting and delivering

effective interview schedules; the pilots that I conducted (referenced above) were a clear part of my strategy for mitigating the limitations described here.

In addition, there were limitations specific to this particular study. Securing sufficient support from busy English teachers was always going to be challenging. Those who volunteered were probably more likely to enjoy teaching Shakespeare and, given the channels used (RSC, NATE and personal networks), were also likely to be predisposed towards active and theatre-based teaching practices endorsed by these organisations. As I indicate several times in this thesis, I never assumed that the teachers I interviewed were typical, nor did I ever anticipate being able to generalise from this study. However, despite the limitations of sampling, the views of these teachers are as valid as those of any other English teacher, whether they are representative or not. In fact, a key purpose of my study was to highlight the need to consider a far broader range of views and practices than are perhaps captured by larger, more general, studies. The experiences of minorities, and outliers, still provide valuable insights into the teaching of Shakespeare; as I explore next, validity was far more important to me than generalisability.

### **3.5.1 Reliability and validity**

Reliability is a cornerstone of many areas of research, a means of testing the extent to which results can be replicated under the same circumstances, known as ‘test-retest reliability’ (Punch & Oancea, 2014:296). Open and semi-structured interviews, with their scope for flexibility and their use of probes, compromise this principle (Bush, 2012:77). One possible solution is to include a combination of structured (for reliability) and semi-structured (for validity) questions. Yet such an approach offered its own compromises, undermining many of the principles of phenomenological and qualitative interviews outlined above. However, some (Hartas, 2010; Bush, 2012) have suggested that reliability is less

important than validity, ‘used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe’ (Bush, *ibid.*:81). Also known as internal validity, Gray advised that it ‘can be directly addressed by attempting to ensure that the question content directly concentrates on the research objectives’ (2009:375). Furthermore, he suggested that validity could be strengthened through building rapport and trust (*ibid.*). In the section above I described revisiting overarching research questions whilst developing and reviewing interview schedules and prompts. Mindful of the ethical issues already explored, I put significant time and effort into building rapport and trust with each participant. Revisiting the recordings of interviews (available on request) during transcriptions pointed to an ease and humour underlying most interviews, suggesting high levels of rapport and trust.

Addressing similar concerns amongst qualitative researchers, Bush highlighted Lincoln and Guba’s 1985 concept of ‘trustworthiness’ (2012:81) as a substitute for reliability. Ajjawi & Higgs (2007) talked in similar terms, suggesting credibility is the goal, which comes through being systematic, transparent, consistent with the research philosophy, and a prolonged engagement. In the final section of this chapter I document in detail how I adopted a systematic approach to analysis, firmly rooted in the research philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology. Furthermore, the pilot study meant long engagement with the subject material before I commenced my core research.

### **3.5.2 Generalisability**

Generalisability, also known as external validity, focuses on the extent to which findings from one piece of research can be extrapolated and applied beyond its confines. As Punch and Oancea indicated (2014), there can be criticisms of qualitative research in terms of generalisability, particularly where sample sizes are small, as mine were. However, Ziebland and McPherson offered a robust

counter-argument, stressing the focus on representation of perspectives rather than statistical representation. They argued that ‘careful sampling, the collection of rich material and analytical depth mean that a relatively small number of cases can generate insights that apply well beyond the confines of the study’ (2006:405). I applied these principles to my later analysis, detailed below.

### **3.5.3 Researcher positionality**

Other real or suggested limitations of social sciences in particular throw the spotlight on the researcher, rather than the researched. Stake suggested that the researcher is ‘often the main research instrument’ in qualitative research (2010:15). Sikes (2004) highlighted the profound implications for qualitative research, as researchers are likely to be heavily influenced by their experiences and beliefs, a view corroborated by Hartas (2010). However, Punch reflected that this ‘positionality’ of the researcher is a characteristic of all research, stating his belief that there is ‘no such thing as a “position-free project”’ (2009:45). Arguing that there are both advantages and disadvantages of the researcher’s position, he suggested on the one hand there might be greater understanding but more bias, on the other there might be greater objectivity but less understanding. What he, and others such as Diefenbach (2008), emphasised is the need to be both explicit about researcher positionality, and analyse the inherent strengths and weaknesses, some of which I attempted to do in the opening section of this chapter.

### **3.5.4 Researcher reflexivity**

Another mechanism to address the above concerns is researcher reflexivity. Some, such as King and Horrocks, have rejected outright attempts to secure reliability and validity:

the researcher's subjectivity will always shape and transform the research process. Seeking to replicate even with detailed, meticulous information would seem to us to be destined to fail. Indeed ... many qualitative researchers assume multiple, contextually located, socially constructed realities and therefore using reflexivity to make positivistic validity claims would be incongruent (*ibid.*:133).

Instead, they recommended researcher reflexivity, which both requires critical self-reflection on how the researcher might influence the research process and underpins Heidegger's approach to phenomenology, explored above.

The use of a journal is another key recommendation. Ortlipp described using a reflective journal as a means to counter some of the criticisms of qualitative research, particularly around researcher bias or positionality. She argued that 'Rather than attempting to control researcher values through method or by bracketing assumptions, the aim is to consciously acknowledge those values.' (2008:695). Through her journal she claimed she could make her 'history, values, and assumptions open to scrutiny' (*ibid.*:697) as well as instilling critical self-reflection and capturing the 'messiness of the research process' (*ibid.*:704). I began keeping a journal at the beginning of my research, using it to capture ideas, reflections and changes in my research focus. As it developed, it also became a check on researcher positionality, as well as a useful reference tool, charting the development of my research and my understanding of the role of researcher (sample notes appear in Appendix J).

### **3.5.5 Triangulation and testing of findings**

Finally, many researchers concur that triangulation and the testing of findings can strengthen validity, credibility and trustworthiness. Miles and Huberman suggested thirteen tactics for testing or confirming findings (1994). These included questioning the quality of data, checking findings, being sceptical over



emerging explanations, and looking for negative evidence: for example deviant cases. I attempted all these during analysis. My pilot study and its use of different methods to my main research allowed a degree of methodological triangulation. This was complemented by respondent triangulation, interviewing a number of people over a number of months. However, Bush concluded that whilst triangulation contributes to validity, 'its uses is [sic] not a panacea' (2012:86). This revisits similar arguments to those outlined above about problematic concepts such as accuracy and reliability, set against the value of individual and subjective ways of seeing and interpreting phenomena.

### ***3.6 Data generation and analysis***

Oppenheim (1992) warned that open-ended questions are easy to ask but often complex to analyse. Various approaches can guide the researcher through this process, yet the choice can be overwhelming. Even within phenomenology Finlay has suggested that researchers can be 'perplexed by the variety of guidelines available' (2014:121). Part of the advantage and appeal of phenomenology is its sensitivity and flexibility, what Finlay described as a 'phenomenological sensibility' rather than something more 'procedural' (*ibid.*). Finlay cited Merleau-Ponty who 'argued that one learns phenomenology by doing it and making it one's own' (*ibid.*:137). Yet this flexibility has downsides, particularly for the novice researcher seeking to balance sensitivity to the phenomenon with appropriate levels of credibility and rigour. van Manen's aforementioned book *Researching lived experience* (1990) focuses on thematic analysis as the main analytical approach for hermeneutic phenomenology, and proved a useful touchstone. However, it was more concerned with philosophical implications of analysis than offering a systematic guide. Finlay (2014) offered useful advice and guidance around potential stages of a phenomenological study. In particular, she stressed the importance of epistemological and methodological consistency and

coherency through clarity of choice between Heideggerian or Husserlian influenced phenomenology. This re-emphasised the need to stay focused on hermeneutic phenomenology: analysis advocated by the likes of Giorgi (*op. cit.*) would not be appropriate. Yet this still left scant methodological guidance. Ultimately I adapted the processes of others working within hermeneutic phenomenology, detailed below.

### **3.6.1 Transcription**

Gibson (2010) outlined a range of transcription methods, highlighting that no transcription method is neutral since all methods require translation of the nuances of speech into text. Gibson suggested three methods of transcription: indexical, unfocused and focused. The first focuses on what might be interpreted as interesting moments in an interview, with the danger of making subjective judgements about what is important or key. Unfocused transcriptions concentrate on what was said, not how. The danger here is that without identifying tone and pace there is no mechanism for capturing whether answers were given enthusiastically, hesitantly, angrily, and so on. Such emotional detail may have considerable bearing on interpretation, all of which affect findings. With focused transcriptions the aim is to capture how the interviewee created meaning through non-verbal cues. Yet this level of detail, along with the transcription of words, is likely to make each interview unwieldy; some level of selection is inevitable, which again runs the danger of subjectivity. Ultimately, I chose unfocused transcripts, but often returned to the original recordings to remind myself of tone, pace, and other non-verbal characteristics.

### **3.6.2 The use of computers**

Many (for example, Punch & Oancea, 20014) provide reminders that, regardless of computer package, ultimate analysis rests with the individual researcher, their judgement and their interpretation. However, many highlight the

advantages of computer packages to analyse data (for example, Watling & James, 2012). I ultimately used a software package called RQDA<sup>14</sup>, an open source alternative to the likes of NVivo. The benefits included the rigour of coding, ease of retrieval, a deep familiarity with every interview by the end, and additional benefits in collating references to individual words or phrases. As explained above, attention to language is a core characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology. Although there was neither the scope nor the justification within my research to undertake complex language analysis, simple word counts proved illuminating in analysing individual interviews. I used these to generate ‘word clouds’, visual summaries of frequently used words. The word cloud generated from Brishti’s first interview is provided in Appendix K.

### ***3.7 Thematic analysis: choice and approach***

As indicated, thematic analysis appeared to be a common choice within hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990), whilst Guest *et al.* suggested that thematic analysis is ‘the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set’ (2012:11). They offered a definition of thematic analysis as identifying and describing implicit and explicit ideas (themes) within the data, from which codes are developed to represent these themes. Others working within phenomenology proposed various stages to analysis. Ajjawi & Higgs (2007) followed six stages, Finlay suggested four (2014). Working within more general approaches to qualitative data analysis Watling *et al.* identified six (2012). I adapted those that most resonated with my research, resulting in six stages. The following table summarises each stage, its purpose, activity(ies), and outcome(s).

14 See: <http://rqda.r-forge.r-project.org/>.

*Table 2: Categories, purpose, activities and outcomes of data analysis*

<b>Category or stage</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Activity(ies)</b>	<b>Outcome/example</b>
Adopting a reflexive phenomenological stance	<p>‘Seeing afresh ... to push beyond what we already know from experience or through established knowledge’ (Finlay, 2014:122).</p> <p>‘Using personal experience as a starting point’ (van Manen, 1997:54).</p>	Brainstorm everything personally known about the phenomenon being researched.	Appendix L: personal ‘Shakespeare brainstorm’
Immersion	To ‘immerse ourselves in the data’ through ‘dwelling’ (Finlay, 2014:126).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing typed transcriptions</li> <li>• Listening again to audio recordings</li> <li>• Capturing initial notes and thoughts</li> </ul>	Appendix I: sample transcript
Understanding	<p>To commence preliminary data analysis which ‘serves to summarise issues emerging’ (Grbich, 2007:16).</p> <p>To commence coding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inductive coding (Ajjawi &amp; Higgs; 2007; Miles, Huberman &amp; Saldaña, 2013)</li> <li>• Methodically annotating, underlining words or phrases of relevance to research questions, summarising initial codes in the right hand margins</li> </ul>	Appendix M: an example of this process, and initial codes that emerged
Abstraction	To look for patterns, themes and categories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further detailed analysis of transcripts</li> <li>• Cross-referencing emerging patterns and themes with a developing awareness of themes emerging in other interviews, alongside the literature and my own experience</li> <li>• Creating OSOPs (One Sheet Of Paper), capturing ‘all the different issues that are raised by the coded extracts’</li> </ul>	Appendix N: sample OSOP

		(Ziebland and McPherson, 2006:409)	
Synthesis & theme development	<p>To undertake ‘a phase of synthesis and integration, of clarification and revelation, where emergent themes are pulled into larger themes and/or narratives’ (Finlay, 2014:129).</p> <p>To address data reduction whilst maintaining complexity (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p>	<p>This involved four linked but discrete activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collating all codes emerging from individual interviews, creating a top-level, master OSOP, grouping codes thematically</li> <li>2. Data reduction, influenced by revisiting the literature to identify points of significant interest and/or gaps, and done in consultation with the RSC</li> <li>3. Identification of larger themes</li> <li>4. Attaching codes and themes to data through RQDA</li> </ol>	<p>Master OSOP (appendix O)</p> <p>Identification of three key themes: the socio-political, professional and personal</p> <p>Sample RQDA code: Appendix P ‘Seeing afresh ... to push beyond what we already know from experience or through established knowledge’ (Finlay, 2014:122).</p>
Illumination & illustration of phenomena	To look at links between literature and themes/sub-themes emerging from the data set as a whole (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Ziebland & McPherson, 2006).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Returning to the literature, looking more closely for themes that had emerged in the data</li> </ul>	Findings and discussion chapters

Some of these stages require more detailed explanation in order to clarify the process of data analysis.

### **Understanding, initial coding and abstraction**

Understanding involved undertaking what Grbich called preliminary data analysis: ‘a technique which can be undertaken on most data as each segment is

collected. It serves to summarise issues emerging' (2007:16). The emerging issues informed initial coding. Whilst the literature review and my own experience suggested codes that I might have anticipated, my purpose was to adopt the phenomenological attitude of looking at the teaching of Shakespeare with fresh eyes. I therefore coded inductively, whereby codes emerge during data collection, rather than deductively which involves having a provisional list of codes prior to starting fieldwork (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013). Using printed transcripts of my interviews with the wide margins recommended by many (for example, Watling *et al.*, 2012) I initially read and methodically annotated each interview, underlining words or phrases that were relevant to my research questions, which I then summarised in the right hand margins.

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) and Saldaña (in Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013) suggested a two stage process to coding, which I adopted. Ajjawi and Higgs described this as *understanding*: 'identifying first order (participant) constructs' and *abstraction*: 'identifying second order (researcher) constructs' (*ibid.*:622). Saldaña described similar stages as 'Cycles'. First Cycle coding involves the initial assigning of codes to data chunks, which can be a single word, paragraph or page, whilst Second Cycle coding, or 'Pattern coding ... is a way of grouping [codes]... into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs' (*ibid.*:86). Appendix M is an example of initial analysis of an interview transcript, and captures the process of understanding and abstraction, and the development of what I termed first and second phase codes. First phase (understanding), on the right hand side, summarised participant constructs. I picked out particular comments such as 'artificial process', 'not meant to be in a classroom'. I then went back in the second phase (abstraction) and pattern coded, using second order researcher constructs, grouping together participant constructs under codes such as 'views' and 'beliefs'. Finally, I adopted the strategy of creating a series of OSOPs for each of my interviews. OSOPs (One

Sheet Of Paper) attempt to capture on a single sheet of paper 'all the different issues that are raised by the coded extracts' (Ziebland and McPherson, 2006:409). This facilitates an overview of a topic or, in my instance, an individual's experiences. Appendix N provides an example of a sample OSOP created from initial coding of the interviews relating to one individual (Fiona).

### **Synthesis and theme development**

This stage was heavily linked to what Finlay described as 'a phase of synthesis and integration, of clarification and revelation, where emergent themes are pulled into larger themes and/or narratives' (2014:129). This was a particularly intense stage, involving four linked but discrete activities: the creation of a master OSOP, data reduction, identification of larger themes, and applying codes and sub-themes through RQDA. First I started by collating all of the codes and sub-themes that had emerged from individual interviews, and created a top-level, master OSOP (Appendix O), where I began grouping codes by sub-theme. Here, for example, values and beliefs which emerged in the analysis of the interview provided in Appendix M are captured on the left hand side as sub-theme B. Fiona's memories of being taught Shakespeare is another example. Captured in the top left hand corner of Appendix N, it fed into sub-theme A on the master OSOP: personal experiences.

At the end of this process, as indicated in Appendix O, I had identified 23 sub-themes: too many to allow manageable and detailed analysis within the confines of my research. The second activity, therefore, was an attempt at data reduction, done in consultation with the RSC, followed by further reflection on gaps or important areas emerging within the literature. This resulted in the loss of six sub-themes: resources, change, use of drama, the unexplained/unexpected, what is absent, and success and failure. However, some of the codes within these sub-

themes were then re-assigned to other sub-themes, or picked up in the discussion chapter, for example 'what is absent'.

The third activity was to group the remaining sub-themes into larger themes, as recommended by Finlay (2014). This was an iterative process, as I went back and forth between transcripts and theme identification. For example, the literature review had highlighted the importance for teachers of Shakespeare of socio-political and professional contexts. Stepping back from my data in order to get a sense, at a macro level, of what was emerging, I was struck by both the level of constraints that English teachers were working under alongside shared experiences, challenges and so on; but also by the staggering degree of variation in response to these shared circumstances and experiences. These variations could only be explored at a highly individual level. I therefore decided to place a far more significant focus on the teachers' personal life histories and characteristics. Thus I ultimately chose to analyse experiences under the three larger themes of socio-political, professional, and personal.

The fourth, and final activity, was attempting to group codes within sub-themes using RQDA. With the three larger themes established, I started working through the next level down, the sub-themes that had emerged through the data reduction exercise, ranging from 'personal experiences' through to 'pedagogy' and 'training'. Each sub-theme brought together various codes which I then attempted to build into RQDA. The final total amounted to more than 100, as it included every possible code. For example, under personal experiences I had eleven codes, such as 'own schooling', 'inspirational teacher', 'seeing Shakespeare', 'home life/parents'. Coding my first interview was both deeply time consuming and, as I progressed, increasingly frustrating. I became aware that I was breaking down each experience into fragments that were too small to be meaningful: I had lost the essence of the lived experience.



This forced a significant re-examination of the nature of lived experiences. The codes represented nuances of these experiences but were meaningless on their own. Whilst I did not in any way want to lose them, I came to the conclusion that they were unhelpful at this stage. Their place was to add colour, contrast and points of comparison within whole narratives, and so I put them to one side until I came to write up my findings. I therefore chose to work at the next level up, and focus on the larger three themes, and the sub-themes (see table 3 below). This involved a refinement of the sub-themes identified in the master OSOP in Appendix O, as also indicated in the following table, where they are referred to according to the lettering used in the OSOP.

*Table 3: Themes and sub-themes*

<b>Socio-political and local contexts</b>	<b>Professional contexts</b>	<b>Personal contexts</b>
Socio-political contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• societal attitudes (sub-theme O)</li> <li>• politics, policy &amp; accountability (sub-theme P)</li> <li>• curriculum and assessment (linked to constraints, sub-theme R)</li> </ul>	Teaching approaches (all linked to sub-theme F) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• literary criticism</li> <li>• use of film</li> <li>• art and design-based</li> <li>• spoken</li> <li>• active and rehearsal-based</li> <li>• contextual</li> <li>• hierarchy (linked to key-stages code within sub-theme Q)</li> </ul>	Life histories (all linked to personal experiences, sub-theme A): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Shakespeare</li> <li>• Non-school Shakespeare</li> <li>• University Shakespeare</li> <li>• Early career experiences</li> </ul>
Local contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• location and local demographics (linked to schools, sub-theme M)</li> <li>• parental attitudes (sub-theme O)</li> </ul>	Pedagogy (linked to sub-theme H) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language, terminology and theory</li> <li>• Types of pedagogy</li> <li>• Teacher- or student-led</li> <li>• Shakespeare repertoire</li> </ul>	Personal identity (all linked to sub-theme C: personal characteristics): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age, gender, ethnicity and class</li> <li>• Personal characteristics and preferences</li> <li>• Identity and experiences characterised by emotions</li> <li>• Knowledge, confidence and skills</li> </ul>
School contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• position and status (emerged during latter stages of data)</li> </ul>	Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making Shakespeare accessible and relevant (linked to sub-theme B)</li> </ul>	Personal philosophies (linked to codes grouped under sub-theme B, values and beliefs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of education and</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analysis)</li> <li>relationships (sub-theme N)</li> <li>whole school cultures (sub-theme M)</li> <li>English departments, colleagues and policies (sub-theme Q)</li> <li>Drama teachers and departments (relationships; sub-theme N)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and D)</li> <li>developing language and vocabulary (sub-theme E)</li> <li>creating positive experiences, removing fear (linked to codes within sub-theme E – Shakespeare plays)</li> </ul>	<p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Politics of teaching, identity, and cultural heritage</li> <li>Beliefs about teaching Shakespeare</li> </ul> <p>Philosophies expressed through desired change (linked to sub-theme B).</p>
<p>Classroom ecology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>multicultural classroom (linked to schools, sub-theme M)</li> <li>gendered classroom (as above)</li> <li>ability and special needs (as above)</li> <li>time and space (linked to constraints, sub-theme R)</li> <li>student attitudes (linked to eco-systems, sub-theme S)</li> </ul>	<p>Student responses (linked to codes within sub-theme S - ecosystem)</p>	
	<p>Initial training, further study and CPDL (all linked to sub-theme J, training)</p>	
	<p>Research and evidence (all linked to sub-theme I, research and evidence)</p>	
	<p>Professional support (linked to sub-theme K, access to support and ideas)</p>	

### **3.8 Conclusion**

An unanticipated consequence of reflecting on and developing the methodology was the way in which a strong interrelationship developed between methodology and the literature. Hermeneutic phenomenology led to revisiting the literature, with a heightened focus on certain themes that emerged in both. For example, the work of Heidegger and van Manen emphasised not only the role of context in shaping lived experiences, but also that individuals are often unable to recognise and articulate these influences. Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology's emphasis on language and absence made me look more deeply both at particular words, but also at what was not being said, what was absent. This prompted a stepping back from the data to look with fresh eyes at certain gulfs, or indeed contradictions, between the literature and my data, particularly around themes such as personal identity, contextual influences, and awareness and use of teaching approaches. All these are examined in detail in the analysis and discussion chapters that follow.

### **3.9 *Pen portraits of teachers interviewed***

The following provides a short summary of each teacher, and their context, in alphabetical order according to the pseudonyms I gave them.

**Ayesha** was an under 30 year old BAME woman. She had been teaching for three years; one year in a school in the home counties, two years in an inner city 11-18 comprehensive in London, where she taught English. She had completed a PGCE in English and was working towards an MA in English.

**Brishti** was a second BAME woman, in the 30-49 age bracket. She had been teaching for seven years in an inner city girls 11-18 comprehensive in London, teaching English and drama. She was doing an MA in Teaching and Learning.

**Caro** was a 50+ white American (now dual nationality), who had been teaching for nine years. Teaching was a second career, and she was teaching in a girls 11-18 school in the home counties. She had done an MA at Kings College, London in association with Shakespeare's Globe.

**Dawn** was in the 30-49 age bracket, a white British woman teaching in the North West. Trained initially as a primary teacher via a GTP route, she had been teaching for 14 years, 10 of them in her current school where she taught English, mostly to SEN (Special Educational Needs) students. She had been the lead teacher for her school in its relationship with the RSC through the LPN.

**Fiona** was an under 30 white British teacher, recently appointed as head of the English department. Trained through the GTP route at her current school in the North East, she had been teaching for six years. Like Dawn, Fiona had been lead teacher as part of the RSC's LPN.

**Gina** was in the 30-49 age bracket, white British, and the third in my sample to come to teaching as a late or second career. She was teaching English and drama in an 11-18 mixed secondary in a predominantly white working class urban area in the North East, where she had been for four years. She had undertaken a PGCE in English.

**Hugh** was a director of learning, was also teaching in the North East, though in a rural area. Male, white British and in the 30-49 age bracket, Hugh was the third in my sample to come via the GTP training route. Although teaching English in an 11-18 school, he did not teach English Literature at A-Level. This was Hugh's second school; his first had been a similar school but in an urban area. He had been teaching for six years.

**Mary** was a white British 50+ woman. A teaching career followed after having children and an Open University degree. She did a PGCE in English and drama and had been teaching for four years. She was in her second school, an 11-18 comprehensive in England's home counties, where she was teaching English.

**Sean** was a 50+ white British male, with 20+ years of teaching experience, with some gaps when he had worked as an education consultant and, at one point, pursued a non-teaching career. Currently teaching in an 11-16 comprehensive school in the East of England, he had had prior experience of teaching in 11-18 schools. Previously a head of the English department he was now deputy head.

**Thomas** was a white British male, interviewed as part of the pilot study. No further background information was gathered about him.

## Chapter 4: Findings – socio-political and local contexts

This chapter presents findings relating to the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare in terms of socio-political and local contexts. Both the literature and hermeneutic phenomenology had emphasised the importance of the former, which my findings supported and are therefore only analysed in brief. What was under-documented was the extent to which specific local contexts shaped teachers' experiences, yet the data suggested that *location* and *local* demographics, school cultures and classroom ecologies were all highly influential. Within the literature I had referenced some of these characteristics within professional contexts. Yet the local nature emerged so strongly within the data that I have analysed findings in this chapter, despite obvious overlaps with professional contexts. Some findings emerged specifically through a focus on language, a key characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology. This was particularly illuminating in relationship to school cultures and relationships. In order to focus on findings that were most illuminating I omitted data relating to some areas of enquiry. For example, choice and use of specific editions is well covered in Olive's doctoral dissertation (2011b) which was released after initial interviews; nothing in the data offered alternative or richer insights. In addition, behaviour was barely mentioned within the data, with the exception of two teachers who referenced it as a problem but only during very early career experiences.

## ***4.1 Socio-political contexts***

### **4.1.1 Societal attitudes to Shakespeare**

Three teachers specifically referenced the influence of Shakespeare's status. Caro described a 'terribly reverential approach to Shakespeare' which she ascribed to the influence of F.R. Leavis, concluding that 'we are suffering under the impact of this reverence, this god-like status that we have elevated him to' (C1). Fiona described her early career attitudes to Shakespeare's texts as 'sacred', and described her students seeing Shakespeare as 'being up on a pedestal ... for people other than them ... for posh people' (F1). Brishti's response was similar: she referred to students 'seeing Shakespeare like a god-like figure ... seen as very much the white middle class thing that you understand and appreciate' (B1). Gina talked about attitudes to literature more widely, highlighting particularly personal connections:

... the very reason I love English, the very reason I became an English teacher actually isn't taught in schools like mine up and down the country because it's not valued for working-class children, it's valued for privileged children (G1).

Dawn focused more on societal attitudes towards Shakespeare and ability, unsurprising for a SEN teacher. She reflected on widely held perceptions that Shakespeare is only for 'brighter students' and not those deemed 'low ability', a view which she found 'quite disturbing' (D2). Sean alluded to this, suggesting a desire by 'Joe Public' for Shakespeare 'to be really difficult at school'. He believed that negativity around Shakespeare was directly influenced by these difficult experiences at school, that many had been 'badly taught it themselves' (S2) a view which Dawn echoed (D2). Separately, Sean linked this to 'cultural biases and people thinking "Shakespeare's boring"', resulting in a 'struggle' for the teacher, because societal prejudices are a start point for many students (S1).

Both Sean and Fiona suggested a cultural acceptability of not liking or understanding Shakespeare (S1; F2). Yet what was interesting was a sense that these negative attitudes were reduced or absent amongst students and their parents from multicultural backgrounds. Ayesha commented that for her students, mostly from non-English backgrounds, ‘there is that kind of sense of cultural capital, that if they’ve engaged with Shakespeare they’ve had some value’.

### **4.1.2 Education: politics, policy and accountability**

There were interesting responses from four teachers to questions about political and policy influences on the Shakespeare classroom. Sean referenced links between policy and cultural attitudes, and their impact on the classroom. He described English as ‘a political football, kicked up and down the right wing of both the major political parties’ (S2). Brishti reported the influence of politics and policy, in terms of the ‘pressure from the government’ and the intense focus on English teaching, and her belief that ‘There are more articles written about the state of English than there are about other subjects’ (B2). Caro referenced the direct influence of Michael Gove who had ‘this focus that Shakespeare is England’s greatest author’. When pressed on the influence on her teaching of Shakespeare, she declared ‘Well, I have to thrash them through it’ (C1). Mary expressed a clear sense of frustration at the shifting education policy landscape: ‘we’re being told what we have to do, then we’re not being told what we have to do, then we are being told what we have to do’.

All nine teachers made unprompted references to the influences of accountability, either in terms of Ofsted, league tables or performance-related pay. Whilst not all explicitly mentioned Shakespeare within these references, the overall environment was undoubtedly influential. Hugh described how ‘the entire school rides on’ performance in English and Maths, resulting in cascading pressures



from senior leadership to him as a middle manager. He reported having to pass these on to his staff, seeking evidence of progress and likely attainment, which ‘... ultimately ... influences how you deliver content in the classroom, and the tasks you get the kids to do’ (H2). Dawn suggested these influences were increasing, with greater focus on school performance and Ofsted judgements of data, meaning that ‘you have to drill down to exam technique and exam focus much sooner than perhaps you would have done in the past’ (D1). Sean suggested that, for him, ‘real English teaching – it's not about tests and exams. But if you come into year 10 or 11, to be totally honest with you, we know we're in a league table game’ (S1).

Ayesha referenced the pressures of Ofsted which Fiona corroborated (F1). Thomas, interviewed during the pilot study, confirmed these pressures ‘because that’s what we’re assessed on ... in terms of performance management’. Gina’s perception was that the pressure from Ofsted and league tables had led to a focus on GCSE English Language rather than Literature, because the latter was ‘too risky to waste curriculum time on’ (G1). This clearly underpinned Gina’s belief that ‘literature’s not taught in this country at KS4 really, any more’, a view informed by personal experience. She recounted how she had been initially ‘impressed’ at interview by her school’s commitment to teaching GCSE English Literature to all students (G2). However, the school had subsequently received a notice to improve by Ofsted, and the headteacher had removed the course in order to focus on GCSE English Language, which more directly affected the school’s league table position. As a result, Shakespeare was not being taught at KS4 ‘because it’s redundant to the qualification’ (G1). A direct consequence that affected Gina was not only fewer A-Level literature students, but students who had missed experiences of a literature course at KS4.

Hugh’s experience echoed Gina’s, although his school still taught English Literature at KS4. However, he specifically referenced current government policy

and focus on English Language within league tables and school performance, and its wider impact: 'I think literature is seen as a bit of an add-on, and I don't feel that in the wider society it's valued'. He went on to describe his students as believing that English Language had 'greater value' than Literature. Conversely, however, Hugh referenced new government policies being introduced, with a greater focus on English Literature, as equally unwelcome because 'the same pressure that we've had on Language will now transfer onto Literature as well' (H2).

Ayesha explicitly reported how challenging Ofsted criteria made the teaching of Shakespeare through drama. She explained how any drama activity needed to end up with writing 'just to show in our books that we've made some progress'. She described this as a 'hindrance' within the teaching of Shakespeare, because 'you can't stick a recording in to show [progress]. So you are inhibited by those Ofsted criteria'. However, Brishti saw a positive side to the pressures of accountability. She described English teachers as 'always a priority! ... whatever demands we make, generally we'll get them', explaining that she could 'win ... battles' if the demand related to Shakespeare, because it was 'seen as being essential' (B2).

### **4.1.3 Curriculum and assessment**

The literature had identified a number of curriculum and assessment pressures on teachers, including an over-emphasis of topics that featured in tests and exams. My data suggested similar findings, which I therefore only briefly consider. Ayesha talked in terms of 'reductive' teaching, whilst Hugh made four references to being 'sad' at having to focus so heavily on curriculum and assessment requirements (H2). Sean explained that 'At KS4 ... you see us teaching to the exigencies of the exam. We are incredibly sharply focused about what makes for exam success' (S1). Caro regarded the 'pressure of assessment

and grades' as an 'indelible shadow, that you can never escape from, [that] hangs over you' (C1), whilst Dawn talked of 'the whole system' as being 'very limiting in terms of what text you should study, and the whole GCSE machine really' (D1). Brishti pointed to the 'pressures of the Shakespeare classroom' which 'will always come down to assessment', claiming that 'English teachers are probably ... the most stressed teachers in schools because of the pressure' (B2). Two teachers volunteered references to their experiences of preparing students for the KS3 Standardised Assessment Tests, known as SATs, even though these were withdrawn in 2009. Dawn commented that 'Teaching to SATs is the death of the soul!' (D1) whilst Sean reflected that SATs 'probably turned off more kids ... than anything else' (S2). Yet Hugh (H1) and Gina suggested the potentially negative influence of removing KS3 SATs, given the reduced opportunities for their students to study Shakespeare. Caro also talked of being 'shocked' by how little Shakespeare there was in her school (C1).

As well as the pressure of any high stake assessment, there were several findings that pointed to the pressure of *how* Shakespeare is assessed. Caro made a direct link between the nature of assessment and Shakespeare teaching at KS4: 'it's that literary analysis that they've got to write about ... that's what they're being assessed on'. She clearly wanted to do more 'workshops, to work around the text' but suggested the pressures of KS4 meant there was no time for such approaches (C1). Dawn gave a more detailed description of her antipathy towards current approaches to assessment which, she argued, treat a Shakespeare play as a

literary text, like a novel... and that's not what it is. It's made to be performed and the assessment should reflect that ... it needs to be assessed for what it is as opposed to what the current system tries to make it (D1).

However, both Sean and Brishti suggested a limit to the influence of curriculum and assessment. Despite references to the 'exigencies of the exam' (S1) Sean

declared that ‘I have to teach for an exam, but that doesn’t mean I can’t do that the way I want to do it. ... I think to a very significant degree I teach the way I want to teach it’ (S2). Brishti volunteered a similar response, claiming that English teachers ‘don’t like the external pressures, they will deliver those things, but when ... the doors are shut in the classroom ... we all teach our subject the way we want to teach our subject’ (B2). Both these responses indicate an interesting degree of teacher agency, which is at odds with suggestions of constraint and compliance emerging from the literature; it is therefore a theme revisited below.

## **4.2 *Local contexts***

### **4.2.1 Location and local demographics**

For Sean, teaching in a school within relatively easy reach of London, location directly influenced his experience of teaching Shakespeare: ‘we’ve got Shakespeare on our doorstep. How blind would we be if we ignored that?’, explaining how a ‘common experience for our kids’ was going to Shakespeare’s Globe (S1). Similarly, Brishti taught in an inner-city London school which was able to benefit from Shakespeare’s Globe Deutsche Bank scheme<sup>15</sup>; as a result ‘... every year for the last seven years I’ve been going to the Globe... I’ve been taking as many as I can. ... it’s what transformed the teaching of Shakespeare’ (B2).

Nevertheless, geography in itself did not explain inclusion or not of the cultural opportunities offered by certain locations. Brishti and Ayesha both taught in inner city London schools: for Brishti, theatre going was habitual, but Ayesha not only made no reference to theatre visits but specifically denied accessing opportunities offered by Shakespeare’s Globe. Similarly, Sean, Mary and Caro’s

<sup>15</sup> A free ticket scheme for London schools which, according to *ArtsProfessional* (Hill, 2013) had benefitted 70% of London’s schools as at 2013.

schools were probably equidistant from London and shared similar demographics. Whilst Sean's school included theatre trips into London, Caro reported how it was 'very difficult to go up to anything at the Globe, or the RSC'. She described the financial and logistical implications of organising a KS5 study day at Shakespeare's Globe 'as 'a nightmare; an absolute nightmare' (C2). She concluded by explaining that she could not therefore take younger groups to London, despite wanting to. Mary made no reference to such activities. Yet Fiona, teaching in the North East, reported various trips down to London, including taking a year 7 group to see a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*.

In terms of demographics, Brishti made explicit links between teaching and students in her class:

you've got to tailor your teaching of Shakespeare to the kids you've got. ... if I ... taught in a traditional private school, I would be expected to teach it in a very different way because maybe the expectation would be that these children would be going off to university to read English, to read drama ... (B2).

Gina, teaching in the North East, made similar references to the influence of demographic. She described her school as distinctly different from others in 'nicer catchment' areas. She suggested limited interest in Shakespeare amongst the school's catchment area, talking in terms of a 'cultural divide', stating that:

90% of the kids would be intimidated by Shakespeare because .... there's no culture of reading in our school ... it's seen as something that geeks do... So, the vocabulary that they have is very limited, the syntax of Shakespeare and the vocabulary instantly puts them off (G1).

Later, when asked about the biggest influence on how she taught Shakespeare, Gina confirmed that 'It's the kids in front of me...That's the main thing that affects how I'm going to teach', explaining that

there's certain classes I'm just going to have to break the text down for them, ... because they cannot access it ... The literacy is such a huge problem that ... years 7 and 8 ... we spend a lot of time doing that before you can actually really get into teaching literature (G1).

Hugh, who also taught in the North East, described the region as 'still ... very industrial', reporting that 'if you speak to the average person they hold very dismissive views of literature, it's all "We used to be made to study Shakespeare ... what bloody ... use is that?"' (H2). Dawn used similar terms about the location and demographic of her school in the North West, describing the area as 'quite culturally limited' (D2). In her first interview she also referenced local attitudes to education. She reported 'a lot of very disaffected young people ... who are in some ways caught up in a poverty ... cycle ... their grandparents have spent a lifetime on benefits, who don't value education' (D1). Sean also described students at his school on the outskirts of London as coming from families 'where there's been generations of disengagement from education, and ... cultural poverty, if not financial poverty as well' (S1).

### **4.2.2 Parental attitudes to Shakespeare**

The data suggested quite clearly that parental attitudes to Shakespeare play an important role in shaping teachers' experiences, through encouraging – or in some cases undermining – student attitudes. Caro referenced experiencing different types of parental attitudes. She described the father of one of her students saying 'I've never done Shakespeare, I don't know why you have to do Shakespeare, I think it's a waste of time'. She reported a more resigned attitude amongst some other parents: 'there is still a sense of "I had to do it, I didn't particularly like it, but I just got on with it"' (C2). Caro contrasted these experiences with the 'very positive' (C2) attitudes amongst parents of children who attended her after school club. Dawn's experience was similar. She

referenced negative parental attitudes, but contrasted these with the surprise from parents whose children started enjoying Shakespeare following the school's engagement with the RSC: 'quite a lot of our parents still can't believe that their children are interested and have got a buzz about Shakespeare, there are parents that are stunned' (D2). These were parents who clearly had no expectation that their children might be capable of a positive response to Shakespeare, which Dawn ascribed to parents' own negative experiences of Shakespeare at school.

By contrast, Brishti and Ayesha described parental attitudes as typically positive. Both taught in inner city London schools, with students mostly from immigrant backgrounds. Brishti reported parents having expectations that their children would study Shakespeare, of having 'very positive' attitudes, even though they might not have understood Shakespeare themselves. Brishti felt this was because 'it's Shakespeare, it sounds serious ... like an essential requirement'. As a result, they would be more 'supportive' of their children studying Shakespeare, because of the 'kudos' (B2). Ayesha described families that were 'first generation, so they've just arrived here ... coming from poverty'. She explained that, although not necessarily 'engaged with their children's learning' they 'care tremendously about their children achieving', and 'if you say that they're doing really really well with their Shakespeare they do look proud'.

## ***4.3 School contexts***

### **4.3.1 Position and status**

Three of the nine teachers were senior or middle managers: Fiona was head of English, Hugh a director of learning, and Sean an assistant head. The remaining six teachers were classroom teachers. It was not until data analysis that findings emerged suggesting status might affect the teaching of Shakespeare. It was not therefore an area explored during interviews. Yet both Mary and Ayesha

reported lack of trust from senior management, referenced below, which may well relate to their lack of authority and status as classroom teachers. By contrast, Fiona's experience was clearly shaped by the responsibility of being a department head: 'I think it's only right that I lead the active approaches to Shakespeare, and campaign a little bit' (F2). Hugh, Sean and Fiona also had far more opportunities to observe others, which Hugh and Sean both cited as particularly influential. For example, Sean commented that

I've probably observed at least one lesson a week ... for the last 15 years, so I've seen an awful lot of English teachers, and I've picked up resources from colleagues, some approaches... I'm happy to rip anyone's ideas, I'll steal anything (S1).

Furthermore, he explained that over many years he had 'taken care of all kinds of teacher training', and also indicated that he had 'published a few things' on aspects of performance management (S1).

### **4.3.2 Relationships with managers and senior leadership teams (SLT)**

Fiona made no comments about her relationship with the SLT whilst, as indicated, Hugh made one brief reference to SLT passing on their own accountability pressures. Sean, however, made regular references to what was obviously a close and influential working relationship with his headteacher, with whom he would stand every morning at the school gates and greet individual students. He explained that the head was a geographer but thought that *The Merchant of Venice* was the most important text he had ever read: 'he quotes freely from that and he was really excited when everyone went up to The Globe, because he had good English teachers at school and that will stay with him for the rest of his life' (S1). Of the six classroom teachers, Dawn was the most enthusiastic about her headteacher, whom she characterised as 'brilliant'. The



school was in a 'very deprived area' and the headteacher wanted enrichment experiences for students which they would not otherwise be able to access. Dawn referenced the school's involvement in the LPN: 'it's filtered down from the head; he's 100% behind it. Anything you want, anything you need to make this happen, he's making sure that we get' (D1).

She further elaborated that 'the SLT are so completely on board it's just not true' (*ibid*), though it should be noted that the extent of this commitment appeared to vary when it came to teaching at KS4, as explored in the next chapter. Gina talked about both past and present department heads in ways that suggested support for the teaching of Shakespeare, but when asked about SLT attitudes towards Shakespeare she described a lack of involvement or engagement: 'there is no consciousness of it as far as I know' (G1). Caro mentioned her department head in ways that suggested support (C1). By contrast, Ayesha's first experience of teaching was with a department head who 'wasn't incredibly supportive'.

### **4.3.3 Whole school cultures**

Dawn described the most supportive whole school culture: 'The whole active approaches thing has really been embraced by the school and by our colleagues. One hundred percent!' She described an RSC training day, attended by representatives from every department, who 'all went away saying "I could use these techniques in my curriculum area" ... There's a really positive buzz about Shakespeare' (D1). Dawn reported not only support but a tolerance of the implications of particular approaches, such as noise. For example, she described a session with her students where they were recreating the beginning of *The Tempest*: 'they had to be able to feel the storm, and you had to be able to hear it'. She explained that in the middle of this 'I've got two groups of children with rainmakers, and banging drums and absolute bedlam going on' the headteacher entered, with a local MP (D1). Dawn's tone of voice, and laughter, suggested this

was not a stressful situation for her and that the headteacher was fully supportive of her teaching approaches. Fiona's school also demonstrated a high level of commitment to Shakespeare, through its involvement with the LPN, whilst Sean reported a supportive whole school culture through a number of separate references. He talked about how 'Shakespeare's one of the people we target, because ... it's so important to us personally' and how 'it's really important to us that every child goes and experiences The Globe'. He also talked about how the school had recently had 'a real Shakespeare fest' (all S1).

By contrast Caro talked about her school, an ex-performing arts school, as having a culture of support for musical theatre but not Shakespeare. She had twice attempted to secure support for the school taking part in the Shakespeare Schools Festival<sup>16</sup> and 'been met with a great deal of stiff resistance' (C1). Mary expressed frustrations about whole school cultures, describing its influence on her teaching: 'you couldn't send a group of students out to go and do a task because they would be challenged by a senior member of staff – "Why are you out of your classroom?"'. Analysis of language offered further insights. At one point, Mary provided background context to her school: '*they've* had a period of sort of flux' and separately '*they* had some really poor results over several years' (my italics). The use of 'they' emphasised a sense of disconnect between Mary and her school, which appeared to have a strong influence on her personal responses to teaching Shakespeare, as explored more fully in chapter six.

#### **4.3.4 English departments and colleagues**

Unsurprisingly, English departments and colleagues emerged as strongly influential, with the degree to which this was positive or negative reflecting departmental cultures and relationships. Six teachers spoke only of positive

16 An annual festival of student Shakespeare performances: <https://www.shakespeareschools.org/the-festival>.

experiences. Hugh reported experiences of strong, supportive cultures. He explicitly referenced the considerable influence of 'other teachers and how they've delivered Shakespeare', describing learning the most from 'other members of staff, seeing it in action and then applying it to my own style and my own classes' (H1). Gina described a similar experience of observing 'experienced teachers ... it was different approaches to teaching it [that] helped me the most with finding out that you didn't have to be sat on your backside in a classroom reading it, badly, to each other'. She reported 'always stealing stuff by the photocopier, and if I'm struggling with something I'll talk to other people in the department' (G1). Brishti described a culture of support and collaboration, in which her department would 'constantly review and revise our old schemes of work on Shakespeare because it's how we get new methods and new ideas for each year' (B2). Fiona and Sean made similar references to supportive cultures, whilst Dawn was particularly emphatic: 'all our department are now trained in the active approaches, everybody's joining in, everybody's sharing the workload. So it's a real team effort. So when I say 'we' I do actually mean WE' (D1).

Of the three exceptions, Ayesha and Mary had both taught in two different schools, with both negative and positive experiences, which appeared to sharpen their awareness or feelings about the impact of different cultures. Mary was very positive about her first school; the opposite appeared true for her second. Her sense of frustration and negativity may well have stemmed from unfavourable comparisons between the two. By contrast, Ayesha's first teaching experience was of a culture broadly supportive of Shakespeare, but not necessarily of colleagues, and certainly not Ayesha. She talked about a sense of exclusion which she attributed to her race, highlighting the overlap between professional contexts and personal identity explored in chapter six. Furthermore, she described her department head as believing 'there's a right way to do things ... and this is a correct interpretation, and this interpretation is too kind of left wing or whatever

else'. There was a palpable sense of relief at working in a more supportive, open culture in her second school: 'Most people within the department have enough experience to ... just go off and do their own thing. And I think it's kind of nice that way... there's no ... sense that this is the right way to teach Shakespeare'.

Caro's experience was interesting. Although she referred to a supportive department head, and used the word 'we' about colleagues, she regularly described them as if they were a separate group entirely, rather than one to which she belonged. The following is one example:

English teachers find it really hard to get out of '... it's not a book, it's a play' because *they* want people to be able to nail things onto a piece of paper ... *they* want to be able to use ... nice little terms, it makes *them* feel confidence and secure. Drama is too expressive, too creative ... and *they* can't get their heads around that (C1; my italics).

The significance of terms such as 'they', 'them', 'we' and 'us' in describing relationships and cultures was identified during data analysis. Seven teachers consistently talked in positive terms of 'we' when discussing current colleagues. The exceptions were Caro and Mary. Whilst Mary did talk about her colleagues as 'we', it was mostly in the negative: 'the scheme *we've* got currently for year 7s is just an introduction to Shakespeare ... it's not really enough, it's not really suitable'; and '*we* need to change the plays that the students are exposed to'. She made several comments about lack of space: '*we* don't have additional spaces that *we* could just go and use ... *we're* almost banned from the library' (my italics). This use of language is another clear indication of the overlap with personal contexts and emotions, and is therefore revisited in chapter six.

### 4.3.5 English departments or individual approaches to texts and schemes of work

#### *Full, edited or abridged texts*

A noteworthy area of divergence was around whole or edited texts, with Ayesha and Brishti providing examples of two opposing approaches. Ayesha described her frustration at running out of time, and the impact it had on her ability to teach an entire play to a year 7 class:

It ended up being ‘we’re going to watch these two different versions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and we’re going to have a look at a couple of scenes’. Which I really... dislike ... it’s important that they read the whole play.

She explained this was rare, that she only used extracts ‘when it’s been so time constrained that we haven’t had time to read the whole play’. Yet Ayesha highlighted that she was unusual in her school. She later described teaching *Othello* to a bottom set KS4 class, referencing a combination of watching three different productions ‘AND we read the whole play, which is not what most classes do, because it’s recommended that we just looked at a few scenes’.

By contrast Brishti or her school had decided that time pressures meant that ‘unless it’s A-Level we’re not teaching the whole text’ because

kids in my school haven’t got time to read it and analyse it in that depth ... for GCSE it’s never the whole play. You couldn’t get a student to analyse a whole play for that piece of coursework. It’s always choose two or three key scenes.

She gave an example of a ‘bottom set class’ studying *Romeo and Juliet*: ‘we’re not giving them the play, which would put them off’ (B2). Elsewhere Brishti described how ‘I think it’s really important to use ... the original text for the

opening, and the key scenes and definitely the ending, key soliloquies, ... key dialogue, key sections' (B1).

Sean was one of three teachers (alongside Brishti and Caro) who talked specifically about 'parallel use of texts, where you've got modern day versions of Shakespeare alongside', explaining that 'Of course I believe in whole text and original language, but if you give that to a 12 year old, many will flounder' (S1). Dawn's experience flatly contradicted this, expressing a clear dislike for such texts. She went on to explain that despite working with special needs students 'it is always original texts', although she clearly adapted them: 'I make a lot of my own resources ... because I have to ... I'm dealing with poor literacy' (D2).

### ***(Whose) choice of texts, schemes of work and teaching approaches?***

For some teachers there was a clear sense of a core repertoire of plays repeated each year. Ayesha talked about 'in year 7 it's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*... year 8 is *Much Ado about Nothing*; year 9 is *Romeo and Juliet*'. Brishti explained that it 'always seems to be the set, the core plays that are always taught' (B2). Dawn and Sean were unusual in talking about a wider repertoire. Dawn described schemes of work that covered a variety of plays at KS3: 'We've got probably a choice of about twenty' (D2). Yet at KS4, all did *Romeo and Juliet* in year 10. Mary was clearly unhappy that 'poor year 9s always seem to get *Romeo and Juliet*, poor year 10s always seem to get *Macbeth*', indicating both her own feelings and lack of choice. By contrast, Sean expressed the same distaste for lack of variety, but clearly had greater control and freedom of choice: 'some kids leave school and all they know of Shakespeare is *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. It's horrible. And you get sick of it. So we deliberately don't do that. We teach *Hamlet* in year 7, I teach *King Lear* at GCSE' (S1).

Gina made an interesting observation about choosing a variety of texts, which related to her needs, rather than the students: ‘this is part of my own professional development, as I’ve tried not to sit on the same plays repeatedly because I don’t think it helps me’. Gina reported having ‘a fair amount of free rein ... with what people choose to teach’ (G1). However, this contradicted a separate statement: ‘We were given the choice of either doing *Antony and Cleopatra*, or *The Merchant of Venice*,’ (G2) which may indicate freedom during some key stages but not others. Mary suggested limited freedom around schemes of work, reporting what she called a ‘sort of homogenised teaching’, which she described as taking place in her school, but suggested happened elsewhere as well. She explained that ‘self-contained’ schemes of work had been introduced, and how teachers in her school ‘expect to be able to walk into the classroom, to look at the lesson plan, open up the power-point, and teach it. Very little in the way of adaptation to their classes, other than a bit of differentiation up or down’. Mary explained this approach had been introduced following poor results, with English getting ‘bashed’. A new policy expected all teachers ‘to teach the same thing at the same time. These are the schemes of work that you have and this is what you stick to’. Mary concluded by reflecting ‘And I think that’s taken the sort of freedom away from the teaching’, suggesting that her ability to choose texts and/or schemes of work had been severely compromised.

Mary provided a further example of her frustrations and sense of disconnect with her department and its teaching approaches. She clearly prioritised the study of language within her teaching of Shakespeare, yet felt this was at odds with colleagues. She was keen to explain that these were ‘very experienced teachers’ but ones who felt that a focus on character would be enough: ‘and they said, “Oh, just ... examine the character of Mercutio, we’re going to do the good and bad Mercutio, just examine Mercutio”’. Mary reflected that ‘I’ve been very, very held back by that, just because the expectation is that we’re to analyse, but they’re not



doing enough with the language itself, they're not speaking it out, they're not trying to experiment with it'. Hugh made a brief reference to schemes of work written in house, but provided no further sense of choice versus imposition.

Caro offered an entirely different experience, both in terms of choice of text and schemes of work: 'We have a completely free choice of texts ... we don't have those written schemes of work. So as long as we fulfil the outcomes nobody cares how you get there, or what texts you use' (C1). This is an interesting example of Caro using the term 'we' in the context of her colleagues, contrasting with extracts examined above. Yet the words 'nobody cares' could be interpreted as both an indication of a positive culture, in allowing freedom of choice, or a negative one, in terms of absence of care. A re-examination of the interview confirmed a neutral tone of voice, making it impossible to speculate retrospectively on feelings. Ayesha offered another variation, suggesting a collaborative approach to decision-making:

with the A-level changes [we] decided that we're going to be teaching *Hamlet* for the cultural capital. I was quite sad, I was like 'I could do ... *Richard III*', but it didn't win over many votes, so we decided on *Hamlet*.

In this instance, re-examination of the transcript suggested that the sadness, whilst genuine, was a passing emotion in the context of broadly positive experiences of departmental practices.

### **4.3.6 Drama teachers and departments**

My findings reflected significant variety in terms of relationships with drama teachers and departments, where they existed. Hugh described a clear division, with the drama faculty doing little, or nothing, around Shakespeare: 'although they go to live theatre, it's not Shakespeare' (H1). Similarly Ayesha referenced a yearly Shakespeare class-based performance as organised within English lessons because 'they don't really do anything with Shakespeare in drama'. Ayesha



suggested a positive relationship, ‘a sense of kinship between English and drama’, but indicated it varied depending on individuals. Caro’s experience corroborated this. She reported how previously the drama department had ‘hated Shakespeare. They’ve never done any’, and contrasted this with a new drama teacher who ‘loves Shakespeare’. Caro described a new collaboration with the drama department, whereby the same text, or a theme, would be covered in each subject, concluding that ‘I believe quite strongly that if you’re going to teach Shakespeare your greatest ally is the drama department, and you should be doing it together’ (C1). Fiona described a similar supportive working relationship with her drama department, whilst Sean, perhaps unsurprisingly as a teacher who had taught both English and drama in the past, made references to a strong working relationship and joint approaches to Shakespeare. Gina was unusual in my sample as she ran the drama department, alongside being a mainstream teacher of English, and described a collaborative approach with her two drama colleagues. Brishti and Mary made no references to drama teachers.

## **4.4 Classroom ecology**

### **4.4.1 The multicultural classroom**

As indicated, Ayesha and Brishti taught in multicultural inner city London schools and frequently referenced how this influenced them. For example, both talked about how this affected choice of play. Ayesha explained how *Othello* had been chosen in KS4 because of the high percentage of black students. In a lengthy extract she reported that she did not think her students would have engaged so well with plays such as *Twelfth Night*, or *The Tempest* because of her students’ ‘cultural histories ... I think they see a part of their identity being represented within that play... it seems a lot more tragic for them because they ... understand the importance of that identity’. She concluded by describing how the play had been a ‘wise choice’ and that students still talked at A-level ‘about how

much they enjoyed doing *Othello*'. Brishti also extensively referenced teaching *Othello*, but indicated her view that *The Tempest* was also relevant to her particular demographic. Across three interviews Brishti repeatedly made unprompted references to her focus on post-colonialism. With a large number of students from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, she felt that *The Tempest* alongside *Othello* were:

two plays that children can understand because ... their heritage is very much from the Caribbean, you can kind of change ... the idea of the island, into a kind of Caribbean island and use it as a modern ... to say this is how colonialism works... but in a positive way ... (B1).

#### **4.4.2 The gendered classroom**

Gender appeared to influence features such as choice of text or approaches. Brishti and Caro both taught in all girls' schools. Referring again to *The Tempest* as a suitable text for students, Brishti explained how she could 'adapt' the play: 'because it's to do with father/daughter relationships and because it's a girls' school, it gives it another level in understanding ... it's all to do with being a girl and growing up'. She talked also about her school's choice of *Romeo and Juliet*: 'Because we're working with girls ... it works on so many levels' (B1). Whilst Sean taught in a mixed school he reported how his school had been 'experimenting with the groupings this year' and had 'deliberately put a male teacher' in with a lower set all boy class. He described these boys and the teaching approaches that he used accordingly:

lots of these kids don't have fathers ... there is a lot of blokey banter, there are kids who have behavioural issues, but I'm using a lot of drama, and they love it. Boys want to get up, they want to run about the room... (S1).

### 4.4.3 Ability and special needs

Student ability cropped up unprompted on a number of occasions, with five teachers explicitly referencing its influence. Ayesha described being ‘nervous’ about teaching a ‘bottom set Shakespeare’ with students with autism and learning difficulties. Hugh explained how ability influenced his teaching; that with groups who

are going to find it difficult you try to get them hooked straight away, whereas if you have a top set ... you maybe spend less time trying to win them round because you’ve already got that natural level of interest.

He reported the need with top set students ‘to be pushing them for the A\* and the As’, which required more time studying language and structure, for example, whereas with students likely to ‘struggle to engage’ he would spend more time preparing the groundwork (H1). Fiona also reflected on her experiences of teaching top set students, but primarily in the context of their responses to particular teaching approaches, explored in the next chapter.

Sean referenced using more drama with lower ability students, describing how he had used *The Animated Tales* ‘as an entry point’ for a low ability year 7 group, before getting them ‘acting it out, retelling it, turning it into modern day versions, lots of tableaux... And then what we might do is look at key scenes from, dare I say it, more adult productions’ (S1). Gina reported a contrast in approaches, depending on designated ability, quoting her head of department who ‘was open’ about the need ‘to be quite mechanical’ in approach to get students up to a certain level: ‘pick your quotes for the kids, because they’re not going to be capable of picking good ones for themselves, you tell them what they’re going to write about’. She described this as the approach for ‘all of controlled assessments ... apart from with the top set who perhaps had more freedom’ (G2). Fiona painted a similar picture in her descriptions of past teaching

and learning approaches. Lower ability students were ‘told’ about a scene or what a word meant, with:

Only the best students in a cohort being able to make any personal connections with the text or create a personal interpretation of the text. ... so, although ... a student would have ... created their own piece of coursework, and nobody’s written it for them ... they’re probably all looking at the same 10 quotes or 15 quotes.

Fiona reported teaching similar students following her school’s engagement with the LPN, highlighting a shift in practice with all students: ‘it’s much more personal, it’s much more full of their own interpretations, their own ideas of the text’ (F1).

Dawn suggested similar changes in practice following engagement in the LPN. She gave detailed descriptions of past teaching approaches that echoed those of Gina and Fiona. For example, she talked about teaching a ‘group of very low ability children’ and being told to ‘get them through this exam’, which was ‘drilled’, and ‘very prescriptive’. Dawn contrasted this with her current practice, talking about using active and rehearsal-based approaches, which she described as ‘inventive’. She explained that:

you’re dealing with children who are arriving and they literally cannot read ... but they’ve also learned that reading is a hateful thing and ... will do anything at any cost to avoid doing it ... You have to find ... inventive ways.

What was noteworthy was Dawn’s expression of a greater level of freedom with SEN students, because they were outside the ‘public exam system as well, so that releases me in a way that I’m not under the same kinds of pressures as the GCSE teachers’ (D1). Caro expressed a similar sentiment:

If I could just do Shakespeare ... like I do with the very bottom sets. Who ... we aren’t expecting to do an exam that covers Shakespeare. ... We workshop

it ... we watch bits of it, we talk about it ... and they come away with a fabulous understanding of the play and they are really interested, they love it (C1).

#### **4.4.4 Time and space**

Unsurprisingly, findings echoed the literature in terms of concerns around time and space, with only Sean making no reference to these considerations. Mary reported not doing drama

as often as I want ... because of the constraints of the classrooms that I'm teaching in ... I move around classrooms quite a lot, and therefore losing part of the lesson to shove the tables out of the way isn't always convenient.

She also explained that she did not have enough time 'to make students feel comfortable' with doing more creative work. Ayesha, Gina, Hugh and Brishti talked specifically about the impact of time constraints on their teaching of Shakespeare; like Mary, Brishti and Gina suggested it most affected *how* they taught, particularly impacting on use of active and rehearsal-based methods. Gina talked about wanting greater access to drama spaces. Interestingly she then conceded that 'actually there are spaces where you can do drama in the school, and you just need to book them', before adding 'you can even clear your desks away in your classroom and do that' (G1), suggesting that it was perhaps absence of time to plan rather than spaces that influenced Gina's experiences.

Caro also suggested 'the pressure of space and time' influenced her teaching, and that 'constraints of space' meant she taught less 'actively' than she wanted (C1). By contrast, Dawn made a passing reference to how 'all the desks and chairs went, and there's just a big empty space' (D1) suggesting this was regular practice for her. Fiona offered a detailed reflection on the challenge of prioritising time in the Shakespeare classroom, and how she had changed her practice to include more active and rehearsal-based methods, even though these were

initially more time consuming. Partly reflecting on her own past experience, she described how teachers can have ‘a style of teaching that you know is going to, is guaranteed pretty much to produce the results that you need and ... in a relatively short period of time. Then, it's very tempting to just kind of go, “here are the answers”’. When I probed further on why, therefore, change practice, she reported her belief that ‘I don't think it works when they get to A-Level and beyond. Because we're not teaching students to think for themselves’ (F1). The implication of Fiona's experience is that certain teaching methods are effective for helping students to pass tests, but not necessarily helping them to think independently. This was an important area for consideration, and is therefore revisited in chapter seven.

#### **4.4.5 Student attitudes**

This section analyses findings relating to pre-existing student *attitudes* to Shakespeare, as distinguished from *responses* to approaches or pedagogies, considered in the next chapter. Seven teachers suggested that students entered the Shakespeare classroom with mostly negative pre-existing attitudes to Shakespeare. Mary described the clear impact on her teaching of Shakespeare: ‘the difference between Shakespeare and English ... is that I know they come into it with preconceived ideas. They've not had, in some cases, a very positive experience of Shakespeare so far’. Caro echoed this suggesting that, with the exception of poetry, Shakespeare prompted by far the most negative response from her students: ‘But usually Shakespeare's the worse’. She went on to explain: ‘before they even hit my lesson, before we even started Shakespeare with my year 11s and when I said we are going to do Shakespeare next term ... they all went “Oh my God, not Shakespeare”’ (C1). Fiona reported ‘trying to overcome the groan’ (F1) when the word Shakespeare was mentioned, whilst Ayesha described it as ‘student baggage’: ‘I think they think “Shakespeare, oh this is going to be hard”’, which she ascribed to lack of familiarity, a ‘fear of the unknown’. Fiona,

Dawn, Brishti and Sean also made explicit references to students' expecting to find Shakespeare boring.

Seven teachers clearly perceived Shakespeare's language as key to these attitudes. As indicated, Sean proposed that many students 'will flounder' in the face of whole texts and original language (S1). Mary described students' fear of saying Shakespeare's text out loud 'because they don't recognise' the language. Hugh reported that 'the challenge with Shakespeare is developing the kids comfort and understanding of the language that it was written in' (H2), a view echoed by Gina, Dawn and Fiona. Caro was emphatic about the main challenge in the Shakespeare classroom: 'absolutely, it's the language, they just don't understand' (C1). Only Ayesha made no reference to language being problematic, though this may have been due to the absence of a second interview, where additional findings may have emerged.

Gina and Hugh provided alternative perspectives to student attitudes. Hugh described his year 7 students as being 'very eager' (H1) when first faced with Shakespeare, whilst Gina suggested her students had no or minimal prior knowledge of Shakespeare, and therefore no pre-existing attitudes. Another interesting perspective was that some teachers referenced attitudes to learning in general. Sean believed that expectations of boredom were the 'default' (S1) responses to lessons in general, rather than specific to Shakespeare. Caro stated her belief that 'kids nowadays have a very low threshold for working at anything', describing cultural attitudes of English students living in a digital world of 'quick' and 'easy' answers, meaning that 'You don't have to fight for understanding' (C2).

Gina expressed a similar sentiment, whilst also highlighting tensions between student attitudes to learning and preferred teaching styles. Gina talked about her desire to foster a particular type of learning environment with her A-Level

students ‘to engage with the dialogue in a different way, rather than it becoming a translation exercise, but they wanted it translated for them ... they’re just wanting the right answer off me all the time’. She expressed disappointment but recognised that, for many students, ‘they’re jumping through hoops’, more concerned about getting a good grade because they want to go on to do something else other than English Literature at degree level. She concluded that ‘my desire for them to be brave with Shakespeare is not top of their priority list’ (G1).

Three more teachers volunteered references to their students’ wanting to be provided with the ‘right’ answer, or ‘spoon-fed’. Mary described her A-Level class expecting to be ‘spoon-fed all the time’, asserting that ‘they’ve lost that independent learning, they’ve lost that joy, that inquisitiveness’. Hugh corroborated this, explaining how he often had students looking ‘for the answer to be given to them’ (H1). Ayesha mentioned a similar experience in her first school, which was ‘definitely “give us the right answer and spoon-feed us”’. Yet she suggested a stark contrast with her current experience, describing her former students as having a ‘laissez-faire attitude’:

not engaging with Shakespeare as much as the students here do. There was just a sense of entitlement, that ‘we don’t really need to work hard’ ... whereas I really feel from ... being here in inner-city London that students are engaged because there’s that kind of attitude at home that you must do well, because you have to lift yourselves up out of poverty.

Separately, Ayesha described her current students as ‘much more kind of open to just being thrown in a pit, and having to work things out for themselves’.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

What was interesting about findings captured here was the way in which the data echoed many of the findings within the literature about the influence of



socio-political contexts but also revealed significant variations. Whilst pressures of curriculum and assessment were clearly a shared concern, the ways in which teachers *experienced* and *responded* to those pressures varied considerably, depending on a number of factors. In particular, there were stark contrasts between the experiences of those living near to London and those living elsewhere. Local demographics affected the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare, sometimes in surprising ways. Ayesha's experience of teaching in the home counties was profoundly different to teaching in inner city London due in part to student and parental attitudes to education in general. School cultures, leadership and relationship with colleagues, both English and drama teachers, emerged as another area where comparison of experiences indicated vast differences. Yet pre-existing student attitudes to Shakespeare appeared mostly consistent, echoing the sense of deep-rooted societal negativity towards Shakespeare as indicated by the literature. All these characteristics clearly shaped, and were shaped by, professional contexts such as pedagogy, teaching approaches, and training, as explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Findings – professional contexts

This chapter provides an analysis of findings relating to professional contexts, in particular teaching approaches, pedagogy, purpose and training. The chapter starts by analysing references to types of *approaches*. In order to avoid skewing the data I had avoided mentioning specific teaching approaches or activities in my interview schedule (see Appendices D, E and F). The references below therefore occurred mostly unprompted, except where I had asked specific questions relating to key stages. There follows an analysis of findings focused on *pedagogy* and *purpose*. What was interesting was that references to the first appeared hesitant within some interviews, whilst all teachers were far more willing and articulate when it came to discussing their purpose within the Shakespeare classroom. This chapter includes an analysis of student *responses* to approaches and pedagogy, as distinct from *attitudes* which were covered in the previous chapter. When it came to ITE and CPDL, the data indicated significant differences in experiences. Where CPDL had occurred it was mostly in the context of opportunities offered by Shakespeare's Globe or the RSC, which are therefore considered separately. There were equally varied references to research and evidence, and access to professional support, which are analysed at the end of the chapter.

### 5.1 *Teaching approaches*

#### 5.1.1 Literary criticism

Little within the data explicitly focused on literary criticism approaches, although it was implied in several references to curriculum and assessment referenced in the previous chapter. Dawn reported teaching prior to her school's engagement with the LPN: 'Our experience of it has been teaching it as a text,

rather than as a performance. For English teachers it's a text, not performance' (D1). Fiona gave a rare description of close reading of the text, though also in the context of practice prior to the LPN:

previously it would be a case of 'this word means this ... Now you know what it means, and I've virtually translated it for you into ... modern day English, now let's start talking about what's going on' and ... looking at individual words (F1).

Two additional teachers talked in terms of what they did not do. Caro contrasted her teaching approach, which included lots of drama, with what she clearly perceived as an unsuccessful 'alternative', which 'would be to just give them this scene and make them bash through it line by line' (C2). Ayesha referenced her approach as follows:

I try to get them to read as much of the play as possible, and not necessarily annotate and analyse every single page, but actually talk about why that issue, what's happening in the play that is relevant or universal to their lives.

The 'not necessarily' suggests that perhaps the practice of annotating and analysing each single page might happen on occasion.

### **5.1.2 Use of film**

There were surprising variations in practice around use of film. Four teachers explicitly reported using multiple productions, in order not only to introduce the plot and characters, but also to focus on interpretation. Caro described watching three different versions of *Macbeth*, which echoed Ayesha's description of watching three different versions of *Othello*. This was clearly not unusual practice for Ayesha who talked separately about year 9 students comparing Luhrmann and Zeffirelli versions of *Romeo and Juliet*. By contrast, Brishti mentioned using excerpts rather than whole films. Sean echoed this approach,

describing students watching perhaps ‘the first twenty minutes’ of different productions followed by a discussion about ‘what makes this one a better production than that one, which one’s clearer’. Hugh, Sean and Brishti also referenced use of *The Animated Tales*.

However, Mary was critical of these because ‘there’s not enough language in them’. Fiona explained how her school had seldom used *The Animated Tales* in recent years because ‘we’ve taken our students to see productions of Shakespeare, so there’s not really been that need to use [them]’ (F2). Dawn made no reference to use of film, whilst for Gina, Caro and Mary, there was a clear preference for films of live theatre productions. Mary described ‘a lot’ of films from Shakespeare’s Globe:

I would prefer to use those, rather than the filmed versions, because I like to show students how it was, how it should be, and the experience that actually it’s not just being performed, there’s an audience reaction too.

Caro made explicit reference to live streaming of productions, explaining how much the students in her school ‘loved the immediacy, they liked the fact that I kept on saying to them “this is live, this is actually live performance”’ (C2). Fiona also referenced using filmed versions of theatre productions.

### **5.1.3 Art and design-based approaches**

Five teachers reported using art and design type activities. With the exception of Mary, who mentioned these activities across all three key stages, the remaining four gave examples specifically relating to KS3 only. Caro referenced drawing; Mary, Hugh and Fiona described students designing sets, costumes and props. Gina gave a particularly detailed description of how she would ‘give them images ... images are great to work with because they can all interpret an image, nobody’s literacy prevents that’. She also talked about ‘a lot of creative stuff based around character work, what kind of person is Lady Macbeth, what colour

represents that, why?'. She concluded that the activity would be 'hopefully noisy, hopefully messy, with some art involved!' (G1), indicating not only a focus on art but the creation of a particular atmosphere within the classroom.

### **5.1.4 Spoken approaches**

With the exception of Ayesha, there were few descriptions of reading the text aloud. Mary made a passing reference to reading out loud, but her focus was on students' difficulties with pronunciation. She was also the only teacher who described reading the text out loud herself: 'I was reading them ... Caliban's speeches, and I read it to them in different ways'. Brishti made a passing reference to 'shared reading' (B2). Gina explained that 'sometimes we'll do choral readings, rather than individuals reading out loud, I would back away from that unless I had a top set possibly' (G1). Separately she referenced reading aloud with her A-Level group, although it was clearly not a happy experience. She described 'reading parts in class' and attempting to prompt discussion: 'I'm thinking it's bloody obvious what's going on, but I'm not getting anything back ... I think it killed it dead really' (G2). By contrast, Ayesha provided a compelling description of reading *Othello* around the class:

So they read it in the seats here ... the discussions they had about race, gender, relationships, were so interesting... and they did amazingly with their controlled assessments, they all got As and A\*s, and they're not top set.

### **5.1.5 Active and rehearsal-based approaches**

#### ***The use of drama and active approaches***

Sean frequently mentioned drama-rich approaches, both in his own lessons: 'I'll always use a lot of drama techniques in lessons', and in terms of whole school approaches: 'we do a lot of drama work in school'. He declared that 'I'm using a

lot of drama, and they love it ... I won't have people tell me that kids aren't interested in drama, and the situations of Shakespeare's plays'. At one point he explained that an observer at the school would 'see quite a bit of role play', whilst in a further description he talked about how he personally would use 'classic drama teacher stuff' (all S1). Indeed all nine teachers volunteered some examples of this 'classic drama teacher stuff', much of which was referred to as active approaches, with clear overlaps with the work of Rex Gibson. Caro made extensive references to how 'we do it completely actively' which she characterised as a 'workshop' approach (C1).

Dawn's descriptions also contained many references to drama work; she explained at one point that 'I do a lot of on your feet, interactive stuff, just to get them engaged with the text' (D1). Brishti commented that 'we would first recreate The Globe Theatre, so I would use bodies to kind of recreate it' (B1), echoing a similar approach described by Hugh. Ayesha and Sean explicitly referenced role play, whilst Mary commented that 'I've done a lot of using the sort of freeze-frame'. Mary also talked of activities that echoed Gibson's approaches, describing equipping students in her previous school with video cameras 'and they did a news broadcast in groups, from Macbeth's castle'<sup>17</sup>. She described scriptwriting activities where 'they needed to go and record scripts that they'd written'. Finally, the use of Shakespearean insults<sup>18</sup> was referenced as a fairly typical activity. Mary explained that 'we will do the swearing at each other and the insult generator, they completely love that one', a view echoed by Brishti, whilst Sean referenced 'playing with drama and language games, like Shakespearean insults' (S1).

17 A similar activity can be found in the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition of *Julius Caesar* (1992:148).

18 Where students are encouraged to use Shakespeare's rich language to 'insult' each other.

## ***Rehearsal-based approaches***

As already indicated, the distinction between active and rehearsal-based approaches is blurred, with many using the terms interchangeably. Furthermore, rehearsal-based approaches can include performance or theatre approaches.

Within my sample there were a number of references to such approaches, indicating the influence of theatre companies and practitioners (in particular, the RSC, Shakespeare's Globe, and Cicely Berry). For example, Brishti made several references to well-established rehearsal-based approaches, of which the following is one example: 'they take steps ... when it's Romeo you take one step forward and when it's Juliet you take two steps and then ... the kids realise who's the most forward person here – it's Juliet. She's enticing Romeo' (B2). Caro used similar approaches, and included an explicit reference to doing a 'punctuation shift' exercise created by Berry<sup>19</sup>, whilst also providing a detailed description of how she had done 'a series of three workshops based on what I had done at The Globe' (C1). Brishti also described approaches that she had learned via contact with Shakespeare's Globe. Mary, Fiona and Gina described using the *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers*, whilst Brishti, Caro, Dawn and Gina teachers referenced the 'whoosh'<sup>20</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, Dawn and Fiona provided extensive examples of their experiences of using RSC rehearsal-based approaches. Dawn's description of recreating the storm from *The Tempest* was one such example. Fiona made a reference to the same activity and in the same interview described the use of rehearsal-based approaches in her classroom, comparing it to her previous teaching. She explained that now there would be

19 Explained in the *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers* (2010:296).

20 An activity originally created by Joe Winston, referenced in the *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers* (*ibid.*:300-301) which offers a succinct and interactive means of telling the story of a Shakespeare play in around twenty minutes.

A much more student-centred approach ... you'd see students coming up with a range of different interpretations and ideas of the text as opposed to one or two fairly standard ideas ... it would be a classroom where ... students might be moving out of their seats for part of it ... where students are very much making ... a personal response and a personal connection with the scenes and ideas of the text or indeed the characters (F1).

By contrast, Ayesha talked very little about approaches such as those described above, but did reference performance-based approaches:

I try to show them as much performance as possible, and try and let them do as much performance as possible ... we might watch a clip of a scene that we've read already, and then I might say ... go off and do your own version.

Similarly, Brishti described working on the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*: 'I'd ... try and do some drama ... everyone's got a line or couplet or something like that and then we'll try and perform it as a class' (B1).

### ***Awareness and use of active and rehearsal-based approaches***

From the above, it might be possible to infer that active and rehearsal-based approaches are relatively commonplace. Yet Caro and Dawn flatly denied this, as indicated by Caro's reference to colleagues, and her perception that they treated Shakespeare's plays as books, with drama being 'too expressive' (*op. cit.*). Dawn was adamant that these methods were not part of mainstream teaching, explaining that:

teachers are very busy, and sometimes it's easier just to stick with what you know, your tried and trusted methods ... if you're going to try out something that is so radically different, you have to get your head round that ... and be confident yourself to do it, to be able to give it a go ... I think part of it is teachers aren't aware, and the time needs to be given over for this ... it's not something you can just read in a book and go and do it (D1).



Fiona's experience appeared to verify Dawn's claim that the approaches require more than reading a book. She mentioned buying a personal copy of the *RSC Toolkit* during her NQT year, but declared that it did not make 'that much sense to me' (F1). Hugh and Brishti both indicated that they were unusual in the way in which they used active and rehearsal-based approaches. Brishti explained she was the only teacher who took students into the car park in order to use these approaches, whilst Hugh verified that no other teacher stood on tables, as he recounted doing (see below) in order to recreate The Globe.

### **5.1.6 Contextual approaches**

There were limited references to contextual approaches. Brishti talked about an exercise focusing on the original staging conditions of The Globe. Fiona made a passing reference to contextual approaches, again referencing an exploration of The Globe, whilst Hugh described an activity he did each year with year 7s, where he would 'set up the room as a very crude Globe theatre' (H1). Gina made two references to 'using some contextual stuff', though she countered this by saying 'but I don't necessarily think they need to know about Shakespeare to do one of his plays' (G1). Separately, however, she described a training day where 'We were advised to try and get the kids to talk about context in every paragraph' (G2), because of assessment requirements. Hugh made a similar reference about how at KS4 his teaching would link the plays 'to social historical context, because ultimately this is what they get judged on at the end of year 11' (H1).

### **5.1.7 A hierarchy of approaches?**

#### ***Shakespeare at KS3***

There were limited references to textual study at KS3. Although this may simply have been an omission, what was noteworthy was that not one teacher described introducing Shakespeare at Act 1 Scene 1 of a given play. Gina went further: 'I

will never dump a page of text in front of them on the first lesson ever' (G1). Instead, findings suggest the use of a range of non text-based activities to introduce Shakespeare. Hugh provided a detailed description of what he would 'always do early on in KS3':

I always take them in a time machine ... [beforehand] I ... set up the room as a very crude Globe theatre ... and we go on a bit of a tour of the school, and then say 'Right, we've arrived back, and it's the late 1500s' .... So they come in, and they love it. I climb up onto the tables as the stage ... and they're down as the groundlings (H1).

Equally detailed was Sean's description of introducing *Hamlet* in year 7 through storytelling:

I ... start telling them a story about a 'friend' of mine who's having a hard time ... 'I'll tell you his name later on' ... and you get to the point where one of the security guards comes ... and says 'look, I saw your dad...', 'No, he's dead...' And this goes on. And they *love* it. They're hooked (S1).

Caro referenced doing 'workshop exercises' (C1) with her year 7s and 8s, whilst Dawn talked about keeping it 'active' (D1). Ayesha's reference above to showing students 'as much performance as possible' was in the context of KS3 whilst, as also indicated, there were a number of references to art and design-type activities at KS3.

### ***Shakespeare at KS4***

Seven of my sample (excluding Hugh and Gina) were teaching Shakespeare at KS4 and described changes of approach as they began preparing their students for the high stake assessments referenced in the literature. Many of these examples were analysed in the previous chapter, given its focus on assessment.

Dawn's response was the most explicit and the most extreme in terms of her description of the transition from KS3 to 4:

it's going to be even worse when – we've now got Shakespeare being taught by all our staff who are being trained using active approaches in years 7, 8 and 9, and then they are going into year 10 and starting with Shakespeare and it's not done (D1).

Dawn explained the school was piloting 'using the active approaches' in the last two weeks of year 9, so that in year 10, when students 'come to do the more formal classroom-based stuff to get ready for the exam they at least have some of the fun stuff and got to know the play that way' (D1). Dawn did not however explain the reasons behind the complete change in approach, which was all the more surprising given the school's stated commitment to active approaches, as indicated earlier.

### ***Shakespeare at KS5 (A-Level)***

Eight teachers taught A-Level, with the exception of Sean. Only Mary and Fiona suggested teaching did not change, with particular reference to the ongoing use of active- and rehearsal-based approaches. Mary expressed a clear sense of disbelief at the notion that drama approaches might be absent at KS5: 'With my year 13s when I was teaching them *Twelfth Night*, they were always up on their feet reading ... acting things out, it couldn't not be, they had to get up and do things'. By contrast, Brishti indicated that 'time constraints meant not that much of moving the tables away' (B1). Ayesha's approach indicated change in terms of drama. Alongside references to literary theory she explicitly mentioned annotation, discussion and close analysis: 'And it's just working through the exam board assessment objectives, which don't include drama'. Having said that, Ayesha clearly attempted to include some drama: 'as it's coming up to exam time, what I did last year was get them to start acting out key scenes as part of their

revision, and looking at how those character dynamics were working between *Antony and Cleopatra*'.

Gina spoke extensively about teaching at A-Level, describing it as 'a different kettle of fish'. She suggested one reason was that her students 'were a little bit intimidated by doing a full play; only half of the class had done a full Shakespeare play, the rest of them had done GCSE coursework on ... a scene or two scenes, so they found it heavy going'. At the same time, she described negative attitudes towards particular teaching approaches: 'when I tried to get them to do a performance of it they hated it, absolutely hated it ...' (G1).

## **5.2 Pedagogy**

### **5.2.1 Language, terminology and theory**

Awareness and understanding of pedagogy was a key area of exploration. I had deliberately avoided using the word 'pedagogy' until the second interview (with the exception of Sean, where it appeared in a clarifying question), so that I could analyse the extent to which the term was used unprompted. What was interesting was that, even in response to my specific reference to pedagogy in second interviews with seven remaining teachers, two (Hugh and Dawn) did not use the word *at all*, across both interviews. The other five repeated the word at the start of their answers but rarely used it again. This may be sheer coincidence; it may suggest discomfort at using a word which is not part of regular vocabulary; or it may indicate views referred to in the literature that the term is considered pretentious. Also notable were the limited number of explicit, unprompted references to pedagogic terminology and theory. Yet Sean was adamant that pedagogical knowledge was not a problem. For example, in response to a question about the pedagogic skills of newly qualified teachers, Sean asserted that 'they've got a pretty good handle on pedagogy' (S1).

However, references to pedagogy or the underlying theory, where they existed within the data, were extremely varied in specificity, detail and/or clarity. For example, Mary gave one of the rare unprompted references to the term ‘pedagogy’, describing how after four years of teaching ‘I know the basic pedagogy’, but she gave no specific details beyond ‘I know what they’ve got to get done’. Brishti volunteered a reference to pedagogy when describing her PGCE experience of Shakespeare:

All the *bits* I picked up ... I didn’t specialise in drama ... so I *fell* into it from the practice, from the kind of theory, the pedagogy of it at uni. I took that away and ... I just remember *strategies* and things that we covered, that [I would] somehow *throw* them in, *little nuggets* that I could *throw* in into my own teaching. I know every year there are new ideas, new pedagogies, new theories coming up but I think I’ve always bounced back on those ones because I learnt those ones (B1; my italics).

This was one of the lengthiest descriptions of pedagogy within the data, yet the italicised words suggest a randomness: *fell*; *throw* (repeated twice) and a ‘smallness’: *bits*; *little nuggets*, which reflect something akin to activities rather than pedagogy, although the word *strategies* could be taken to mean either. I therefore followed up on this with an explicit question about pedagogy, to which Brishti responded by explaining

I wouldn’t say I was thinking ... this is a kind of pedagogical kind of school of thought I’m using. I would be thinking in terms of ‘what have I got in front of me? Which learners do I have?’ ... am I looking ... for a more kinaesthetic way of doing something ... So I suppose that’s the kind of pedagogy I use ... looking at the students I’ve got and kind of catering for them (B2).

Brishti's language was very hesitant, and it was therefore difficult to analyse with any certainty whether this related to the concept of pedagogy itself, or the terminology.

By contrast, in a prompted discussion about pedagogy, Caro came across as more assured, stating her view that pedagogy is 'frequently ill-informed, and poorly researched ... and not founded on evidence' (C2). However, this was her only specific reference. Gina used the term five times. She volunteered a perception that 'your pedagogical knowledge and all of that awareness that you have when you're being trained at university, well it kind of slips away a little bit'. Yet she reported that 'it's kind of coming back now with the training that we're doing'. She went on to provide a detailed description, outlining the influence of an Advanced Skills Teacher who delivered most of the school's CPDL. She was a 'massive proponent of the newer pedagogical attitudes to learning, where ... children have to understand the principles underlying what they are doing'. Gina described adhering to these principles:

It influences the way I teach [but] unhappily, sometimes I find myself in the position of providing information that they then try and shovel into their heads which is ... what happened at A-Level when I taught *The Tempest*... I was trying to be a facilitator, but I ended being the opposite of that because, something just didn't work along the way, or the way I was doing it ... and that was a problem because the pedagogy that I was trying to put into effect there didn't really translate to what happened in the classroom ... something I need to reflect on.

Gina's experience suggested either problems with her own implementation, or the difficulties faced by teachers trying to introduce alternative pedagogies; or of course a mixture of the two. Nevertheless, the focus on pedagogy was rare amongst my sample. What was also interesting was the way in which Gina and

her school appeared to conflate pedagogic theory with administrative and behaviour management policies. She described how departmentally there was less focus on pedagogy in terms of ‘approaching English as a subject’ and more on what she called ‘pedagogic policies’: ‘we’re the sort of department that meets the kids in the corridor, we have an activity for them to be doing as soon as they come in the room’ (all G2).

There were no references to some concepts such as dialogic teaching and meta-cognition, whilst other concepts were rarely mentioned. The word differentiation appeared in interviews with Brishti, Mary, and Sean, though only as passing references. Hugh was the sole teacher to talk of scaffolding, whilst the concept of ‘modelling’ was reported only by Brishti, Dawn and Fiona. The latter provided a rare description of pedagogic reflection. Describing LPN training Fiona reported benefits beyond seeing practical strategies used:

the framing of those strategies being used in the classroom, and looking at how you can model the questioning around those strategies in order to then draw out the student responses ... has had a huge influence on how I teach Shakespeare (F1).

Hugh made references to framing, and was the only teacher other than Fiona who reflected on the use of questions, describing how he would be ‘asking questions, probing points ... and, rather than giving them the answers, just directing them to the right place, asking them the right type of questions ... to guide their thinking a little bit’ (H1). He revisited this in the second interview, reflecting on how being filmed whilst teaching had prompted him to reflect on his questioning skills.

Sean was the only teacher who made specific, unprompted comments about theory and research. He referenced Bruner, a book on differentiation by Chris

Dickinson<sup>21</sup>, and the work of Barry Hymer<sup>22</sup>. Sean mentioned epistemology, using theoretical language more typically associated with academic research. At one point, for example, he volunteered the following reflection:

I would say I'm a constructivist, and it's important that children make meaning, and work things out for themselves, but there are times and it's particularly when you have the exigencies of the test that you might find yourself being perhaps a bit more objectivist (S1).

It may be that absence of terminology is strongly linked to the nature of interviewing, with responses reflecting the language of the interviewer's questioning, as already indicated above. Yet in other areas teachers provided details unprompted, suggesting perhaps that the nature of pedagogy might not feature as highly as other characteristics of the Shakespeare classroom.

### **5.2.2 Types of pedagogy**

During second interviews I explored whether teachers in my sample were aware of and influenced by debates about traditional or progressive pedagogies. No one volunteered the term 'progressive', and whilst there were unprompted references to 'traditional' teaching, most related to teachers' own experiences of being taught. Dawn was the only teacher who volunteered a reference to 'traditional' pedagogies (though she used the word methods), counterbalancing a description of active and rehearsal-based approaches by suggesting: 'that's not to say that those traditional methods aren't still valuable as well for some things'. She was clearly aware of the debates: 'You only have to go on Twitter to get involved in that one. They are always arguing. I find it quite amusing!' (D2). When prompted through explicit questioning, Caro explained 'I try and keep up to date. I am aware of the debates ... progressive versus transmissive, and subject versus

21 Probably *Differentiation: a Practical Handbook of Classroom Strategies* (1993).

22 See: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Barry-Hymer/e/B00MOO9OA2/ref=sr\\_tc\\_2\\_0?qid=1491029113&sr=1-2-ent](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Barry-Hymer/e/B00MOO9OA2/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1491029113&sr=1-2-ent).



skills... I think maybe I look at the debates and try and think, “now what’s my view?” (C2).

As to whether or not teachers in my sample characterised their teaching in this way, Brishti’s description of her approach, referenced above, suggested a pragmatic rather than an ideological approach to pedagogy, tailored to the students she had ‘in front of me’ (B2). In response to a specific question, Sean echoed Brishti’s pragmatism, denying a polarity between progressive and traditional pedagogies: ‘I don’t think they’re versus – I think they can be complementary, and sometimes ... you can come up with a stronger hybrid ... by using both judiciously at different times’ (S2). Dawn echoed this, suggesting ‘there’s a place for both of them’ (D2).

### **5.2.3 Teacher- or student-led**

Although there were few unprompted references to the terms traditional or progressive, what did emerge from the data were references to, or suggestions of, teacher- or student-led approaches, which tend to be associated with traditional or alternative pedagogies. Fiona explicitly used the term ‘student-centred’ twice (F1); yet no other teacher used the terms ‘teacher-led’, ‘student-led’ or ‘student-centred’. However, with some teachers there was a strong sense of teacher-led learning. For example, Brishti gave a description of teacher-led objectives: ‘I would try and bring down the play into one word... I would always start with that one thing ... with something like *Macbeth* we might start with the idea of revenge’ (B1). She went on to explain in detail how her school focused on cross-curricular projects: ‘every year ... we try and look at a different culture’, and how she had chosen a study of *Macbeth* through a focus on Haiti. Having researched it herself ‘I ... gave it to them and said “here’s the facts about Haiti, here’s the facts about voodoo” and they basically took the scene of the witches and they did it as a voodoo version, and that was an instant success’ (B1).

Similarly, Caro talked about a thematic approach, which may or may not have been dictated by curriculum or assessment requirements, but was clearly teacher-led: ‘we’ll look at *Romeo and Juliet* from the point of view of conflict, and then draw that into another play, maybe *Henry V* or *Macbeth*, but looking at conflict’. Yet interestingly Caro appeared to want students to feel some activities were student-led: ‘they chose scenes; I’d already chosen them but I let them think that they were choosing them’ (C1). By way of contrast, Ayesha described a more student-led approach: ‘when I’m teaching Shakespeare I try and let the class take ownership ... as much as possible, because if they don’t have that sense of autonomy or agency with their learning I just think they’re ... going to turn off’. This approach was echoed by Mary: ‘You need to allow them to actually explore and experiment’. Similarly, Dawn talked about a student-led approach to Shakespeare’s language, suggesting a preference for making students work out the language themselves, rather than being offered a teacher-led ‘translation’:

grappling with the language, it makes them think, it makes them ask questions of themselves and of each other, and actually work it out ... rather than being handed a translation and being told this is what this person is like (D2).

### **5.2.4 A Shakespeare repertoire?**

Findings already analysed indicate that teachers in my sample employed a wide-range of approaches in their teaching of Shakespeare, particularly at KS3. What was interesting was that some teachers suggested they employed more strategies to teach Shakespeare than in other English teaching. Hugh described using a ‘wider range’ of teaching strategies and approaches in order to ‘hook the students in’ (H2). Brishti echoed this approach: ‘I teach Shakespeare like a collage, so I would cover the whole text in various ways’. She described her inclusion of original text, alongside clips of film, use of drama and group reading, before concluding by repeating her emphasis on a: ‘collage of experience... For KS3, I

think, for GCSE, that suffices ... I would extend on that kind of montage of experiences at A-Level but we would cover the whole text' (B1). Sean described a variety of approaches, reporting for example integrating film with other activities. Sean suggested a different purpose, however: 'The one thing I think you have to do is vary it. If you did one method all the time you'd pretty soon become boring' (S2).

### **5.2.5 Learning**

As mentioned in the literature, Alexander's 2008 definition of pedagogy omitted a reference to the learner or the learning. Amongst my sample there was a similar bias towards reflecting on teaching rather than learning. When doing a simple word analysis, at least one of the words 'teach', 'taught', 'teacher' or 'teaching' was amongst the fifty most frequently used across every interview (see Appendix K for an example). By contrast, words describing the learner, or learning, were less frequent, even including words such as students or pupils. Rare examples included Brishti talking about a prop becoming a 'learning tool' (B1), although elsewhere she talked about 'making Shakespeare enjoyable, thinking about your learners' (B2). Dawn provided an analysis of her focus on student learning as a SEN teacher, exploring how students might learn 'the same thing but in different ways' (D2). Sean provided the most references to learning, both in the context of Shakespeare and school in general. For example, he talked about 'if you really switch children on to learning at school, and we've done that really successfully with Shakespeare', elsewhere talking about 'deep seating the learning' or 'enthus[ing] kids about learning' and referring to Shakespeare as a 'great tool for learning' (S1). Caro actually reflected on this phenomenon, volunteering a reference to how, as a new teacher, she 'fell into the trap that almost every single new teacher does', describing being 'task focused' rather than thinking about 'what are the kids going to learn today?'. Instead, she described a preoccupation with keeping them 'occupied',

and the learning comes second. And we all do do that. ... I've got my hand on the door and I'm thinking 'What am I going to do today?' But ... you should at least be thinking, 'Right, what do I actually want them to learn and gain by doing this?' (C1).

## **5.3 *Purpose***

### **5.3.1 Making Shakespeare accessible and relevant**

There were several references to accessibility as a core purpose driving the teaching of Shakespeare. Mary described how 'in a Shakespeare lesson I will try and break it down so that ... it's an easy bite ... and then rack up the challenge when they've taken the hook'. Ayesha mentioned breaking down the text, using her knowledge of the class, and 'what they are interested in to get them on your side, to engage with that text'. Picking up on earlier references to a variety of approaches Gina explained an approach that was clearly focused on improving accessibility:

I go in often with images, music, anything around the sensory kind of end of it that homes in on scenes and ideas before I show them actual words, and then we kind of focus on the words from what we've already gleaned outside of that (G1).

Equally, there was a clear sense of purpose in teachers attempting to emphasise relevance as a means of making Shakespeare's plays feel more accessible and engaging. Brishti mentioned going to Shakespeare's Globe when they had plays in various languages, and bringing back leaflets. Her purpose was to enable students from her multicultural school to be 'immersed in things like that ... "oh, that's my language, oh that was in Albanian"', in order to create a point of 'connection' (B2). Similarly, Hugh referenced doing 'anything you can to remove

this idea that Shakespeare lived hundreds of years ago and the world he lived in is totally different to ours'. He reported trying to get students to understand 'why he is so relevant', pointing to 'what he wrote about ... is still happening to us today, and it's still a huge part of our life' (H1). Ayesha described wanting students to 'engage with those stories on a human level' which was also a high priority for Dawn, who wanted students to:

really engage with it, and get and appreciate that it's about people, it's not words on the page, it's about people and relationships and things that are still relevant to us. That's the thing that influences me the most (D2).

### **5.3.2 Developing language and vocabulary skills**

For Sean, making Shakespeare more accessible was clearly linked to a purpose around developing language skills:

we're talking about them using ... 16th and 17th century language – but some of them aren't adept at 21st century language. But if you can tackle that and have strategies to broaden kids' vocabulary, Shakespeare becomes that much more accessible again (S1).

Caro suggested a similar preoccupation with developing language skills, but specifically around 'technical terms that relate ... to literary terms like metaphors, similes, alliteration, onomatopoeia' (C1). Hugh described 'getting them to play around with the language, getting them to be creative with it, to translate it into their own words to help foster deeper understanding of it' (H1). Mary made multiple references to her focus on language. For example, she explained how

I always explain to the students 'You will know 99% of the words, they're just in a different order to what you're normally expecting'. Almost demystifying it, making them read without asking them to understand it or correcting their pronunciation ... to get the feel of the language in their

mouths rather than just facing them with something ... that they just don't get.

### **5.3.3 Creating positive experiences and atmospheres**

Fiona described how, in creating a year 7 unit, what was 'uppermost' in her mind was students 'having a positive experience of Shakespeare ... trying to overcome the groan that you get when you teach Shakespeare so that further up the school they feel much more positive about Shakespeare'. She expanded on this, with a particular emphasis on 'enabling them to play with the imagination and some of the magic of Shakespeare' (F1). Separately she talked more broadly about wanting to bring about 'Student engagement with the ideas ... student enjoyment of the text' (F2). Hugh also suggested a clear purpose around enjoyment: 'at KS3 you're much more focused on keeping it fun' (H1). Mary described a focus on 'all the sort of fun things that you can do', whilst Dawn was explicit about prioritising enjoyment: 'I want them to enjoy it. I want them to appreciate it, the beauty of it and the genius of it' (D2). Gina explained that a high priority for her was that 'I would like them to get more enjoyment out of it than I had at school' (G2). Creating positive experiences was linked to promoting a particular type of atmosphere. As reported above, Gina described creative-based activities with a clear underlying purpose to create a 'noisy ... messy' (G1) atmosphere. Similarly, Hugh talked about putting together a series of activities where he would 'always try and aim for that busy atmosphere' (H1).

### **5.3.4 Removing fear**

Heavily linked to creating positive experiences were references to making Shakespeare less intimidating. Ayesha described trying to 'ease' her students into Shakespeare, for example showing them the documentary *Muse of Fire*<sup>23</sup> as a

<sup>23</sup> A 2013 documentary about Shakespeare: <http://www.museoffirefilm.co.uk/>.

way of demonstrating that ‘this isn’t something to be scared of, this is something to be enjoyed’. Gina echoed this: ‘My main priority these days is for me to start slowly and for them not to become intimidated... I try to make them feel that it’s OK if they don’t understand everything’ (G1). Mary shared a similar purpose that had a clear impact on teaching approaches and classroom atmosphere: ‘I don’t want them to be afraid of not understanding it, of saying it wrong’. Interestingly, Dawn suggested that a purpose in teaching Shakespeare was not just about reducing fear of Shakespeare, but also anxiety around different teaching approaches: ‘we started with warm up games just to get them all sort of playing and relaxed and in the mood because obviously it’s quite intimidating when all the desks disappear’ (D1).

### **5.3.5 Allowing for interpretation and possibilities**

The data suggested some teachers were keen to create an environment open to interpretations and possibilities, and were preoccupied with rejecting the notion of a ‘right answer’. Gina referenced wanting her students ‘to be able to interpret things freely, or come up with their own ideas’ (G2). Sean alluded to his school’s approach to education more broadly, but linked it to a clear purpose in the Shakespeare classroom when he talked through a focus on

showing children possibilities ... we’re very keen on showing kids there aren’t any right or wrong answers, there are different answers, and that’s really true for Shakespeare as well because there are so many different interpretations (S1).

Ayesha echoed this, suggesting an encouragement to accept that no one knows what Shakespeare ‘was trying to tell us’ and that instead ‘what people say now is about what *they* think about Shakespeare and what he means in this world’, concluding that she wanted her students to do the same: ‘So I don’t ... set up that

there's a right answer'. For Dawn, this meant a specific focus on interpretation. Despite referencing her school's use of the Whoosh Dawn explained that

I use it sparingly ... it's easy to fall into 'Oh, let me just tell you a story' and you can't help yourself, you're actually putting your own interpretation on that story ... and suddenly all other interpretations are closed off (D2).

### **5.3.6 Doing something 'different'**

Some findings suggested teachers were trying to shake up preconceived notions and expectations merely through the act of doing things differently. For example, Mary volunteered that 'the more you give them something that's a bit different, the more they respond, because it's not sitting in class facing you and you're spoon feeding them'. The most detailed description, again unprompted, came from Dawn who talked extensively about the ways in which her school were trying to approach Shakespeare 'differently'. She described students arriving in a classroom, where desks and chairs are stacked away, and how 'instantly that's not their expectation, so you get this sort of buzz going on, "what are we doing? why are we doing this?"'. She went on to describe the purpose behind this approach in creating a contrast for students:

what a relief to go to a lesson where you're not sat down looking at the interactive whiteboard, or writing stuff down in your book but you're up on your feet doing something. ... it generates that interest, it's changing the mindset which is making them more receptive to new approaches, and receptive to ... Shakespeare (D1).

Gina made more of a passing reference, explaining that 'I try to teach it pretty differently, ... I try to keep as active as I can and bring in lots of other resources and mediums to work with the play itself' (G2). Gina did not explicitly explain why; neither did Sean, who provided an even more broad reference to the teaching of Shakespeare: 'we try to do something different, and we do also use



the sonnets, and so on' (S1). This is not a finding that is reflected in the literature, and only emerged during data analysis, so I missed the chance to probe the explicit purposes behind Gina, Sean and Mary's comments. Yet taken with Dawn's more detailed description, findings seem to suggest that 'doing things differently' was a common purpose.

### **5.3.7 Shakespeare as means of experiencing theatre**

Finally, one purpose was a complete outlier, and therefore brief in detail, but important to note in terms of the role of individual teachers and the influence of their personal preferences. Fiona made several unprompted references to her enthusiasm for theatre, and how she would regularly arrange theatre trips for her students: 'trips are a little bit my baby, I'm the trip queen in my department' (F1). At one point she articulated this as a clear underlying purpose in her teaching of Shakespeare: 'I think what's at the heart of my interest in teaching Shakespeare is that I love the theatre ... I'm passionate about the theatre ... it's really important that we give students that experience of the theatre' (F2).

## **5.4 *Student responses***

In the pilot survey one teacher had provided the following response to a question about how they felt about teaching Shakespeare: 'Enjoy Shakespeare at the theatre and have a passion for teaching drama. However, teaching Shakespeare had always been intimidating due to student response'. The data emerging from my main research reinforced the influential role of student response, but highlighted considerable variety. Only Sean talked in terms that were consistently positive, declaring that 'we find they're really positive about Shakespeare from year 7 onwards', a result, he believed, of trips to Shakespeare's Globe combined with 'really good schemes of work':

when we do it again in year 8 they're already feeling positively about Shakespeare, because they enjoyed what they did in year 7, and then when you get them into year 9, it's no sweat. We've already hooked them from year 7.

When pressed about how many students left his school feeling positive about Shakespeare, he confidently asserted it would be all of them: 'That's a bold claim. I think they really do. ... It's very well taught here' (S1). Ayesha described similar responses: 'generally whenever I've taught Shakespeare they've just had so much fun, they've been really excited, they've wanted to talk about things'. Separately she described pleasure at her students' response to questioning from the deputy head during a performance management observation, 'and all of them said that they really loved Shakespeare, that they felt that Shakespeare wasn't scary'. However, she concluded with a far more hesitant: 'But I think they all do kind of enjoy it'. Brishti also described some positive responses but was equally constrained, frequently using the word 'quite' to qualify responses: 'they quite like that play on words', and 'in fact they quite enjoyed the story and they probably did quite well in the piece of work ... it wasn't as tough as they thought' (B2). However, whether the qualification sprang from the students' experience, or Brishti's confidence, or use of language, is unclear. It is therefore revisited in the next chapter when I consider possible links between gender and confidence.

Both Fiona and Dawn talked of positive responses but within the context of changes in teaching practices, which they explicitly attributed to their schools' involvement with the LPN. Dawn explained that her students 'thought Shakespeare was going to be really, really tedious and difficult and boring, and actually they're finding themselves having fun because of the way that it's being taught' (D1).

Fiona provided a similar example of how, subsequent to her school's engagement with the LPN, there was much more 'excitement' around Shakespeare. She explained how the school conducted annual student surveys, including a question on which unit students had enjoyed the most: 'and the Shakespeare one features equally as prominently as the other units of work, whereas four years ago that certainly wouldn't have been the case' (F2). Fiona and Dawn suggested their students' increasingly positive responses to Shakespeare were the result of the use of active and rehearsal-based approaches. Caro was emphatic that these approaches were behind her students' engagement with Shakespeare. She described students being 'much happier' to explore meaning, and engage with the text, of being more willing 'to struggle with the language' and 'to engage in a very specific, literary way with the text, once they've found a way into the text through a more active exercise' (C2). Separately she remarked that 'if you do enough active workshopping ... they come to Shakespeare with a much more open mind ... they love the workshop approach, they absolutely love it' (C1).

Nevertheless, Caro's experience offered interesting insights into the way students from different schools responded to teaching approaches, no doubt reflecting school cultures. Caro provided detailed descriptions of conducting a series of workshops as part of her MA, working across a number of schools, including a girls' grammar. She described students at the latter as:

like animals in a zoo let out of their cages because we were in the ... lovely drama space that wasn't being used and they absolutely were wild... they would have been happy just because they were actually being able to move around as opposed to being seated at a desk (C1).

Yet this was slightly at odds with a separate description of asking students to create gestures to match Shakespeare's words. Caro explained how girls in every school would try out gestures as they went along, with the exception of the grammar girls who, 'to a child, sat down with the text first and worked out which

one they thought would work best and then stood up and rehearsed it. So they did not understand the value of physically doing something first'. Caro mentioned interviewing one grammar school girl who declared that 'I found it very boring working like this because ... you didn't really give us time to actually look at the words and think about what would fit' (C1). Caro reported her belief that the student 'had no connection, no understanding of learning like that ... because they see themselves as kids who learn from books rather than kids who learn in any other way' (*ibid.*). Caro was convinced that the girl's response was the result of a grammar school education, and conveyed a clear sense that students deemed high ability struggle more with active and rehearsal-based approaches. Furthermore, Caro's experience highlighted how different school cultures, alongside (lack of) familiarity with particular approaches, could affect student responses.

Fiona corroborated the view of higher ability students as being the 'most difficult group ... to kind of convert and ... to use the active approaches with'. Fiona suggested a number of factors behind this, including students being used to 'one style of teaching' which has worked for them, and an anxiety around their continued progress and attainment. As a result, Fiona suggested 'it takes a little bit of time to build up their confidence and their trust' (F1). Ayesha had a similar experience with A-Level students, declaring that they enjoyed drama but 'I think for sixth form students, if you're doing a lot of drama, there's that sense of "this isn't real learning", or "how does this relate to our exam?". Mary described resistance to drama and rehearsal-based approaches, referencing students' 'fear of getting it wrong, it's the fear of speaking it out loud'. She attributed this to students:

not doing enough drama. Because then when you try and teach them Shakespeare you can't get them up and performing because they're too

afraid, ... and they don't want to look silly in front of people that they don't know.

Dawn echoed this view, describing one year 8 girl who 'completely refused to engage' with Shakespeare through active approaches because she did not want to act 'like an idiot' (D1).

The above further highlights a clear finding around tensions between teacher and students over certain teaching approaches. In another extract Mary described teaching *Much Ado about Nothing* with a year 12 group, showing them a DVD 'so they get an understanding of the play, but actually I think ... they should be reading it aloud ... but they're not at that stage, they need to know the plot, because that's how they've been taught ... they need to learn'. The word 'should' suggests a dissonance between Mary's preferred approach and that of her students. Similarly, Gina made explicit references to tensions in the classroom. Her description of teaching in KS3 indicated both her preference, and her success, at using active and performance-based approaches:

I've been trying to do it in an active way. They really respond to that. They find it tough on the page, but there's ways and means to get around that. It tends to be by making it active, by showing them good quality versions of it being performed (G1).

Yet Gina's experience reflected a contrast when it came to an A-Level group, who had 'absolutely hated' performing. She suggested that students had been 'very influenced by the style of teaching they'd had ... an excellent teacher' but whose 'style' of teaching Gina felt uncomfortable with: 'he lectured them from behind the desk and the kids made notes, and took it all in, very studious, very academic, very good memories. But it's not a very ... collaborative atmosphere' (G1). Separately Gina expressed frustration and disappointment about the way her A-Level students responded to the teaching methods she wanted to use: 'I

was probably expecting a lot more of my A-Level group, and what I got was actually deeply disappointing' (G2).

Finally, Hugh, Gina and Caro offered detailed descriptions of negativity springing from the difficulty their students had with Shakespeare, particularly the language. Hugh reported his experience of students' changing response to Shakespeare, where the eagerness at year 7 referenced above 'fades off' in year 8 and 9 as they encounter difficulties with 'looking at whole plays ... understanding how themes run through, how characters develop' (H1). Gina made extensive references to lack of enjoyment, suggesting that it was rooted in students' struggle with the language, re-enforcing a consistent theme in Gina's responses about the low literacy levels of her students.

## ***5.5 Initial training, further study and CPDL***

### **5.5.1 Initial training**

Six teachers trained via PGCEs: Gina and Ayesha did English; Sean, Brishti, Mary did English and drama, whilst Caro did English and Maths. Three in my sample trained via the GTP route: Fiona and Hugh, and Dawn who trained to be a primary teacher. Eight out of the nine referenced little or no initial training relating to teaching Shakespeare. Whilst Mary talked about teaching Shakespeare within her placement schools, her descriptions suggested this was through choice rather than external encouragement or support. Ayesha chose to focus on Shakespeare within her PGCE, though again there was little indication of external support or training. She commented that 'I don't think we had any formal training to do with Shakespeare', although she did describe watching videos of Shakespeare being taught which 'was quite powerful'. Beyond that, she was given 'suggestions of drama activities and what you might do with any class ... general activities but not specific to the Bard or anything'. Others within my

sample had even less training. Fiona referenced ‘ad hoc conversations that you have ... in the staffroom ... but other than that, absolutely nothing’ (F1). She reflected that, in terms of ‘how to embed it [Shakespeare] effectively within a lesson, I don’t think I’d ever thought about or come across any support with that aspect’. Gina could recall one or two sessions on Shakespeare, an area ‘that I was concerned about in terms of my own abilities’ (G1). Hugh claimed he had had ‘very little’ Shakespeare-specific training either during ITE or since (H1). Dawn trained as a primary teacher and along with Sean made no reference to personal experiences of ITE training.

Brishti was the only teacher who talked extensively of the inclusion of Shakespeare, and also drama, within her English and drama PGCE at the University of Warwick. She described how ‘I really landed on my feet’, talking about the lasting influence of sessions with Jonothan Neelands<sup>24</sup>: ‘I don’t ever remember there being the text... he always gave us extracts... He introduced us to the idea of the whoosh’. As indicated earlier, Brishti gave a detailed description of ‘strategies’ that she had learned during her PGCE (B1). Interestingly, Gina did a PGCE which included drama, yet the extent of drama training was not clear given that Gina later commented that ‘the drama side of it I’ve kind of been learning on the fly really’ (G1). Dawn, who oversaw English trainees in her school, volunteered several references to ITE, and was adamant that teacher training needed to change with regards to Shakespeare. She reported that teacher training for English ‘is very much around technical knowledge and teaching the specific skill-set you need to get through the exam system’. She acknowledged the need for that focus, but repeatedly talked about the need for training on Shakespeare that is ‘more about the performance’, adding separately ‘that’s the shift that needs to happen in terms of teacher training. Start thinking about it in terms of audience and an experience, rather than as a text’ (D1).

24 Internationally renowned for work in drama and theatre in education.

## 5.5.2 CPDL

Whilst teachers in my sample made references to CPDL in general, findings relating to Shakespeare-specific CPDL suggested significant variations in experience. Sean described the influence of a ‘fantastic’ training day with Rex Gibson in the early 1990s: ‘and that was just fascinating, his approach to teaching Shakespeare which was ‘get off your arse, and run around the room with the kids, and explore it as a drama text’ (S2). Elsewhere Sean talked further about experiencing ‘some really inspiring training ... over the years’ (S2). By contrast, Mary, Gina, Ayesha and Hugh reported having had no or minimal Shakespeare-specific CPDL. For example, Gina explained that all CPDL ‘has been focused around the exam’; in the past, when Shakespeare was on the syllabus, she had ‘about one session, to get that coursework done’ (G2).

### *Shakespeare’s Globe CPDL*

Both Brishti and Caro talked extensively about CPDL offered by Shakespeare’s Globe. Brishti made several references to INSET sessions that she had attended. She described in particular ‘jump[ing] on’ opportunities to attend twilight sessions, from which she would gain ‘at least ten ideas’. She described ‘techniques that I thought have been the best CPDs that I’ve ever been on, because you left completely transformed’ (B1). Separately she referenced her perception that over time she had got better at drama ‘because I really love going to The Globe for their CPD’, suggesting clear influence of particular approaches as: ‘the things that I... want to develop over time’ (B2).

Caro did a Masters in Creative Arts in the Classroom, which involved two modules at Shakespeare’s Globe. She talked in detail about using exercises she had learned, and made multiple references to this experience throughout both interviews. She described her initial assumptions about the training, that it



would be ‘great fun but I was a bit suspicious of the first module and then I did one workshop ... and ... I suddenly thought “OK yeah ....that’s confirmed much more strongly, that’s what I was thinking of”’(C1). Caro claimed that her views on teaching Shakespeare pre-dated this training: ‘I know I saw the texts as plays before then’, but that ‘it was going to The Globe, and doing my masters that changed my attitude to how to teach Shakespeare’ (C2).

### ***LPN CPDL***

Both Dawn and Fiona made multiple references to the experience of CPDL via the LPN. As already specified, the findings suggest these experiences influenced not only their teaching, but also use of pedagogical language. Fiona provided several examples of influence, reporting how the training had helped her overcome the notion of Shakespeare’s texts as ‘sacred’ and how she now had the confidence to ‘chop and edit’ text (F1). In a lengthy extract Fiona described how her school’s relationship with the RSC, including training days, had ‘benefited both subject knowledge of dealing with Shakespeare but also techniques and strategies for using in the classroom’ (F1). In her second interview she reported how she and her peers had acquired ‘the confidence in the department to consider other plays, and also the skills to teach those plays effectively’, and how she had looked at theories around the teaching of Shakespeare ‘far more than I would have done previously, and I think that’s been a benefit to my teaching’.

In a further extract she went on to describe how the relationship with the RSC had also influenced

the entire school’s ambition regarding Shakespeare and his place in the curriculum, so it’s not just something that we have to get through, but it’s something that we ... can teach effectively, and that our students can enjoy and really get something from (F2).

Dawn suggested that the training had been equally influential, describing how 'the way that I teach has changed quite a lot since we've had the training with the RSC'. In a separate extract, Dawn reflected on a 'shift' in her school's teaching of Shakespeare. She explained that before working with the RSC, teaching was 'classroom-based ... not up on your feet doing it. Because it's never occurred to us that we could do it like that ... whereas now the shift has gone very much away from that and it's gone back to it's a performance, it's a script'. Dawn concluded that the 'LPN has given us ... such a completely different way of teaching ... a completely different set of experiences' (all D1).

### ***Time for planning and reflection***

Along with lack of time influencing classroom teaching, it also affected opportunities for professional learning and reflection. Brishti made a specific link between time and CPDL when she described, with regret, how she wished she could

sit down and really plan the lessons, thinking of fresh ideas ... putting together all the things that I've learned from various training and ... adapting it to the play that I'm teaching right now. ... I've seen some amazing things during training and I wish I could adapt, I had time to put that into my planning (B2).

Time spent on reflection appeared to vary considerably. Ayesha, Brishti, Sean Caro and Mary made no references to reflection, though this could mean absence from practice or simply absence within interview responses. Hugh made one reference to the use of cameras to observe teaching, which he described as a 'really good self-reflection tool' (H1).

By contrast, Dawn twice volunteered references to reflection, describing herself as

very reflective and I'll look at this worked, this didn't, why didn't it? And this worked for this child, didn't work for this one, so why? I talk to the children quite a lot and take feedback from them. And then I feed that into my planning(D2).

Fiona volunteered a reference to how she was 'constantly reflecting on all of this' (F1), and separately responded to a question about evidence by describing her experience of CPDL with the RSC:

the whole process with regarding working out what works and what doesn't has been about me doing bits and pieces at Stratford, then coming back and trying them in my own classroom, reflecting upon why it works, why it didn't work, how can I change it to make it work better (F2).

What was interesting about Gina was that she commented on the difficult experience of trying to teach *The Tempest* at A-Level by volunteering a reference to reflection: '[it is] something I need to reflect on'. I probed her on this, specifically asking how much time she found to reflect on her practice:

it's quite rare. ... to be honest this experience of talking to you ... has made me reflect more closely on that experience of teaching *The Tempest* ... than I had time to ... I reflect constantly after lessons ... I reflect on the moment, but if you're talking about sitting down and going 'Right, where did this go wrong? How can I prepare this next time?' ... That doesn't happen until ... the lesson's around the corner really (G2).

## **5.6 *Research and evidence***

With the exception of Sean, unprompted references to academic research and evidence were relatively rare. In response to a question about pedagogy, Caro volunteered a comment about research and evidence instead, suggesting it was something she considered fairly regularly: 'I wouldn't say it's on my daily radar,

but ... maybe fortnightly'. I have already mentioned her assertion that pedagogy 'is ... frequently ill-informed'; she gave, as an example, past encouragement to play music as students entered the classroom, which she dismissed as 'rubbish science'. Caro described how she was 'quite keen on basing my teaching ... on things that are actually scientifically proven' but would 'cherry pick the things that I believe will work with ME, and in my classrooms'.

Caro further observed how 'my Shakespeare teaching tends to come from the research I did a while ago', meaning her MA. Whilst recognising that this research 'is now older' she asserted 'I don't see any evidence' for other approaches, declaring the current 'fashion ... for teaching Shakespeare is that it be very active; that is what seems to work... and I know that already so that's what I do'. She went on to explain that if she read an article that suggested a different strategy or approach she would 'consider whether it would work with my classrooms, and with my students, and me as a teacher - because everybody's different'. Within this extract Caro referenced the *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers* (2010), *Creative Shakespeare* (2014), NATE and 'educational research bits that I receive from the librarian' (all C2), suggesting that she was keeping abreast of current research.

Hugh provided another rare example of a volunteered rather than prompted reference to research and evidence, explaining how his school had 'done quite a lot of work' based on the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit<sup>25</sup>. Hugh described a focus on teaching that had 'the most impact on students and their rates of progress... Number one is to drive pupils' understanding'. Influenced by the Toolkit his school 'deliberately' chose *Macbeth* for study at year 9 'because that's what they'll be studying at year 10 and 11 ... so

25 See: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit>.

the work they'll be doing in those two years is purely focused on what they'll need to do for the exam' (H2).

Prompted responses to the question around use of research and evidence varied. Dawn referred to a 'whole bank of evidence' on the RSC website as well as an online LPN community:

we're constantly communicating ... you'll get an email 'I tried this today ... and it was brilliant ... these are the results I've got from it, try it out; what do you think?' ... there is quite a lot of evidence out there. And maybe some of it is anecdotal, but it's none the less there (D2).

As indicated, Fiona reported looking at theories relating to teaching Shakespeare far more than she had prior to the LPN. She also provided a rare example of the influence of perceptions of what did not work. I had probed her school's adoption of rehearsal-based approaches when previous teaching had appeared to be working. In response, she explained

I don't think it works when they get to A-Level and beyond. Because we're not teaching students to think for themselves ... we're not developing their thinking skills. We're not encouraging them to, to really push the boundaries, and to think outside the box, and that's not really preparing them for the future (F1).

Others talked more generally about 'what works'. For example, Gina reported how you 'just pick stuff up ... over the course of the time that I've been here you gather stuff as you go along, and you work out what works and what doesn't' (G1). Similarly, when asked about why she used drama in her teaching, Brishti responded by saying 'I think it's just because we know ... for our students ... that's what really works... giving them opportunities to perform pieces and ... to explore Shakespeare in interesting ways'. Brishti expanded on this, suggesting that 'the practical everyday stuff' is more influential than theory: 'I think the

theory is relevant but ... it's not part of the everyday'. Brishti felt that whilst teachers 'are aware of theories and ideas' there are 'so many', though she did not elaborate on what that meant for her. She did however identify the source of theories and ideas for her and in her school (a teacher attending training; reading the TES), and also explained that 'a lot of teachers are doing... I'm doing ... a teaching and learning MA, so things you covered there'; yet she concluded that 'other than that ... I don't think there's [the] opportunity to find out about those things' (all B2).

Caro also reported the influence of 'what works'. She specifically referenced her experience at Shakespeare's Globe, and the *RSC Toolkit* and explained that, as she 'applied' these strategies 'it works ... it's showing results' (C2). As indicated in the literature, causality is a complex area and caution therefore needs to be applied to statements referencing results and impact. What is clear, however, is that teachers' *perceptions* of causality is influential. Dawn described the use of RSC approaches across 'all aspects of the curriculum, and one of the things that's had a really big impact on is reading'. As reading coordinator for her school, working with students who need extra help with reading, she also noted that those students had 'actually started using the context to work out words they don't know, and that's come directly from doing it with the Shakespeare'. Finally, she referenced her school 'seeing improved written work ... we are seeing progress, measurable, recordable, it's there on paper progress', giving detailed examples about 'use of language; their use of sentence structure'. She also referred to 'one of my colleagues who works in a primary school, she had exactly the same results' (all D2).

## **5.7 Professional support**

Three teachers made a number of references between them to NATE or LATE. Brishti described NATE as ‘trying to ... [make] Shakespeare enjoyable ... using different methods and approaches to engage students’. She explained the reasons for her continued involvement, which gave interesting insights into her wider attitudes to teaching: ‘I’m always looking at the bigger picture and ... if I wasn’t part of NATE I think a whole world would be kind of closed to me’ (B2). Caro described joining NATE when doing her MA because she wanted home access to their publications which she described as ‘very practical’, and ‘very evidence-based’ (C2). However, she later described the RSC and Shakespeare’s Globe being more influential when it came specifically to Shakespeare. Fiona talked about departmental membership of NATE and the benefits of its network and newsletters which alerted her to events and resources, whilst Sean, Gina and Hugh made only passing references. Ayesha did refer to NATE but suggested London’s IoE was more influential:

the people I trained with, we all kind of keep in touch, and we talk about teaching strategies, and we’re all still at the IoE as Masters students, and still writing things together and talking about teaching practice, and we’re still taking to tutors and people that we’ve met at these conferences about our practice.

As already indicated, Dawn referred to an online LPN community and ‘constantly communicating with them’ (D2). Within my sample there was considerable variation relating to the use of social media, but little indication of influence on teaching Shakespeare.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

By contrast with the previous chapter, there appeared far fewer shared influences and experiences, with significant variations emerging within the data over training, CPDL, and knowledge, confidence and use of pedagogy, approaches, research and evidence. Ayesha, Gina and Hugh's experiences of minimal ITE or CPDL starkly contrasted with the experiences of Brishti, Caro, Fiona and Dawn. Sean's awareness and use of education theory and terminology was very different to others in my sample, a product perhaps of his role within SLT and responsibility for, and delivery of, extensive training over the years. Student responses to different pedagogies and approaches varied not only between schools but even within them, as Gina's experience attested. What also emerged was the extent to which the purposes underpinning the teaching of Shakespeare appeared to vary so much, often revealing highly personal agendas for the Shakespeare classroom. Indeed, much of this chapter indicated the overlap between professional and personal contexts; an examination of the latter is the focus of the next chapter.



## Chapter 6: Findings – personal contexts

In this final data analysis chapter I consider the influence of life histories, personal identity, and philosophies. Findings suggest that all three provide interesting insights into later use, and variations in use, of teaching approaches and pedagogies, considerations at the heart of this research. The data also indicated quite how varied personal contexts are. Large-scale surveys, such as those cited in the literature (for example, Goodwyn, 2002), inevitably miss some of the subtler or less well-reported variations. Yet the findings around motivation to teach and ethnicity, in particular, indicate quite how influential specific individual circumstances are, and the importance of considering all perspectives even when they do not reflect findings reported in larger samples. As with the previous chapter, a focus on language revealed further insights, particularly around the nature and experience of emotions, teachers' own and the emotions of those around them.

### **6.1 *Life histories***

#### **6.1.1 School Shakespeare**

Hugh, Dawn and Ayesha suggested school experiences of Shakespeare were consistently positive. For example, Hugh talked about how his teacher let them 'explore and play around with the language and the characters', how 'there was never any right or wrong' and how 'it was always sort of delivered in a way that engaged us through our experiences before then linking it to the text' (H1). By contrast, Sean, Fiona, Gina and Brishti described negative experiences. Fiona reported her earliest memories of Shakespeare being

year 9 SATs ... as a fairly conscientious student I remember panicking: 'I have no idea what is going on in these scenes'. I enjoyed English, I was

trying desperately hard, but just being clueless regarding what was happening(F1).

Fiona declared a love of literature and Shakespeare, but that these emerged at A-Level. Reflecting on his earliest experiences of Shakespeare, Sean declared that ‘I was badly taught it at school’ (S1). Brishti described her experiences of Shakespeare as ‘boring’, ‘quite difficult’, not ‘very accessible’ and ‘very text-led ... they weren’t the most positive experiences’ (B1).

Gina’s experience echoed Brishti’s. She explained that whilst she did not hate Shakespeare at school ‘it took me a long time to actually love it’. She made a direct link between her school experience of Shakespeare and its influence on her own teaching:

it was the element of my literature courses that I least enjoyed, and I was aware that I didn’t want to do that to the kids that I taught, so I was very conscious of trying to ... gain some strategies ... so the children didn’t come in going ‘God, we’re doing Shakespeare’.

She described finding Shakespeare ‘tough’ at A-Level, explaining that ‘I don’t think I got my head around Shakespeare in any sense really until my degree’ (G1).

As one of the older teachers, Mary explained not remembering much about school except reading plays and writing essays. Caro had a similar memory of studying *Henry V* for O Level ‘and that was taught by reading around the class’, with A-Level following the same pattern: ‘I didn’t see a performance, I didn’t watch anything, I just had to read it’ (C1). Neither Mary nor Caro suggested any particular response to this style of teaching, either positive or negative.

## ***Experiences of different approaches***

Several of the examples above suggest the unsurprising presence of ‘text-led’ literary criticism approaches. There were also several references to reading round the class. As already indicated, Brishti and Gina were the strongest critics of their own experiences. Gina made several references to her dislike of the teaching approaches she experienced in school, frequently using the word ‘dry’: ‘I think we took parts in class, but there was no performance aspects to it, it felt quite dry really, you were sort of reading it in class, studying it ... going away and writing about it’ (G1). However, the similarity with Caro and Mary’s experiences, and the absence of negativity in their descriptions, indicates other factors at play, which may relate to personal preference and experiences of (in)effective teaching.

Elsewhere, there were descriptions of films and theatre visits playing a prominent role in some experiences. Ayesha gave the only reference to film at primary, recalling *The Animated Shakespeare: Taming of the Shrew* ‘and I just loved it’. Mary described a school trip to see what was probably the newly released Zeffirelli film of *Romeo and Juliet*, whilst Fiona described the influence of Luhrmann’s version. Mary and Dawn both made passing references to school-based Shakespeare theatre trips. Fiona described what was clearly a profoundly influential experience of an A-Level theatre trip to see *A Comedy of Errors* and ‘I absolutely fell in love with it’ (F1). Both Brishti and Hugh explained that they had not gone on school theatre trips; the remaining teachers made no references at all.

Gina was the only one to mention art and design-type approaches. She frequently described her memory of education as ‘really really bad’ and, as already indicated, her perception of teaching approaches as ‘dry’. However, one experience she described in some depth:

At a younger key stage I do remember being more into the actual story of the play, and I don't know if that's because of the choice of plays, or actually because of the way we were engaging with the plays was significantly different. I remember doing more art-based stuff with *The Merchant of Venice* ... we were drawing the casket, ... doing the scrolls and things inside, and I vividly remember that (G1).

She mentioned this again in the second interview, describing 'art-based tasks' (G2) as standing out in her memories of school Shakespeare. Gina's teaching approaches made frequent references to using art and visual images in the classroom, suggesting that these childhood experiences were powerful influences on her as a teacher.

There were no references to experiences of contextual approaches. By contrast, active and rehearsal-based approaches cropped up in a number of descriptions. Dawn embellished on her positive experiences of Shakespeare: 'it was up on your feet doing it... and no compromise on the text ... in fact really it was a very rehearsal-room kind of approach to it' (D1). This was particularly interesting given Dawn's assertion, reported in chapter four, that active and rehearsal-based approaches were 'radically different' and that, in her current school, 'it's never occurred to us that we could do it like that', an inconsistency not picked up until data analysis, but one of a few examples of contradictory narratives. Ayesha made occasional references to the use of drama, whilst Hugh talked extensively about drama-based approaches including role play and hot seating and 'whole class' pieces of drama (H1). Hugh also talked about seeing small theatre companies who would come in and put on edited versions of Shakespeare plays, though this was an isolated reference to such approaches. Mary, Caro and Sean made no references to drama at all, whereas Gina was explicit about its absence.

However, Brishti reported not enjoying drama approaches. She recalled studying *The Tempest* in year 8 in the drama classroom and her sense that the teacher ‘tried their best to lift it off the page’ but her memory of ‘it being quite boring’ (B1). Yet this was another example of contradiction. In a separate part of the interview Brishti again referenced being taught *The Tempest*:

it’s very clear to me even though it’s about twenty years ago! ... it was about a father/daughter relationship and we were stranded and we used the props of the classroom to recreate an island, or being in a cage or something.

Reflecting on these experience as a teacher she described it as ‘quite a successful way to do it in the early nineties’ (*ibid.*).

### ***One’s own teachers***

Hugh, Mary, Fiona, Dawn, Ayesha and Sean all made specific references to the positive influence of a particular English teacher. Hugh made the most unprompted comments, describing

the way that my teacher sort of delivered it really inspired me... I’m still feeling the benefits of that today, and so that’s very much the approach I try and take and mirror almost, when I deliver Shakespeare now (H1).

Sean described how one particular English teacher took an interest in him and encouraged him to do English Literature, and how this relationship turned into a lifelong friendship. Brishti also referenced an influential teacher who became a colleague and friend. Fiona described the influence of ‘a really enthusiastic drama teacher and a really enthusiastic history teacher and that’s what led me to wanting to teach, I think’ (F2).

### 6.1.2 Non-school Shakespeare

The references to non-school experiences of Shakespeare fell into two categories: the presence or absence of Shakespeare in the family home, and theatre visits. Both Ayesha and Mary described positive family experiences of Shakespeare via books in the home. Ayesha reported a book-rich house, including a 'graphic novel of *Macbeth* kicking about the house and I just adored it'. Mary described being given a book of Shakespeare stories: 'knowing the stories, and knowing the plots really did help... for me Shakespeare has always been something that was actually good fun, and not to be scared of'. No other teacher referenced books in the family home, although Sean specifically highlighted their absence, describing his family as 'tabloid readers. There weren't books at home' (S1).

Sean went on to explain that his family 'weren't theatre goers' either. However, what was interesting about Sean was his description of independent theatre going. When asked about his first experience of Shakespeare he explained how there had been no room for him in the English Literature class, but how he had been encouraged by the influential teacher referenced above to take the exam anyway:

And my first experience of Shakespeare – a good play for boys I suppose if you're 15 ... – was *Julius Caesar*. I read it myself, got it, loved it, went to see the play by myself, turned up for the exam, and got myself an A (*ibid.*).

Gina explained that her family never went to see Shakespeare's plays: '[it] wasn't part of the culture of our family' (G1), somewhat surprising as her father had studied theatre. Hugh talked of never seeing a theatre production of Shakespeare's plays until he was an adult, whilst Brishti, Fiona and Mary made no references at all.

By contrast, Ayesha, Caro and Dawn all made references to a family culture of regular theatre going, which included Shakespeare. For Caro, this seemed to have been particularly influential. She glossed over school teaching of Shakespeare and instead described in detail her experience, between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, of going to the theatre with her mother: ‘we went to a lot of theatre then and we went to a lot at the RSC’, repeatedly describing how she ‘loved it’. This love of performance continued, and again Caro described in detail ‘an absolutely halcyon academic year’ at university where, rather than attending lectures, she spent her time watching ‘opera, ballet, theatre – I just went to everything, absolutely everything’ (C1).

### 6.1.3 University Shakespeare

Hugh, Caro, Fiona, Gina, Brishti, Mary, Dawn and Ayesha all had English degrees, whilst Sean had a degree in English and drama. As already indicated, both Brishti and Gina suggested that their love of Shakespeare started at university, with Brishti declaring ‘I loved *The Tempest* and I loved *Othello*’ (B1). Other references to the influence of university were scarce, and mostly related to coverage of Shakespeare’s texts. Whilst Hugh made no reference to the content of his degree, Ayesha, Mary, Sean, Fiona, Dawn and Brishti all described detailed coverage. Brishti described the clear personal influence of this experience:

you got to learn it at such a level that you end up liking it. Because it’s so thorough. ... because you’re investing that time in studying the text ... I think it becomes a lot more engaging and so I think that’s the irony, to really appreciate it ... I had to go to university to understand it (B1).

Caro described similarly extensive coverage whilst at the same time expressing a concern about lack of coverage for others. She described her degree as

very old fashioned, very traditional and I think that is a key – if you’re thinking of teacher education in the future – ... an English degree from one

university is not the same as an English degree from another because there is no compulsory Shakespeare study (C1).

Gina's experience corroborated Caro's assertion as she made a reference to doing only one unit at university. What was interesting within my sample were Hugh, Fiona and Sean's experiences of recruiting and managing others; all three perceived lack of subject knowledge as problematic. Fiona felt that younger staff 'have less time to develop their subject knowledge' than 'older members of staff' because in the past teaching 'wasn't quite as pressured' (F2). Sean talked disparagingly about universities 'churning out graduates who ... aren't as rigorously academic ... people are coming in with *huge* gaps in their subject knowledge, and thinking that they're qualified to be English teachers' (S1).

#### **6.1.4 Early career experiences**

Sean provided clear examples of positive early career experiences of teaching Shakespeare. He talked about having three A-Level groups in his first year of teaching and doing 'an awful lot of Shakespeare', including going 'to the RSC all the time' (S1). Mary's early experiences were equally as positive but for very different reasons. Mary described being 'lucky' to be in a good school where she was 'very supported' and where there was an abundance of spaces outside the classroom that could be used for teaching. She went on to describe the sorts of active and drama approaches she used in the teaching of Shakespeare, and the influence of this experience:

I was very lucky that I was allowed to explore, to experiment a lot. That taught me huge amounts about what you can do in the classroom ... having done the drama, I knew ... what I could get away with and what the students would actually then respond to.



Hugh referenced the positive support and influence of more experienced teachers through lots of joint planning ‘to make sure you’re covering relevant aspects’ (H1).

Elsewhere I have referenced Gina’s positive experiences of learning from more experienced colleagues. Yet Gina repeatedly described her initial lack of confidence: ‘I was worried about teaching [Shakespeare] ... I didn’t have any trouble understanding it myself, or enjoying it myself, it was how to pass that on that worried me’ (G1). Gina explained that on becoming a teacher ‘Shakespeare was the thing that frightened me most about teaching’. Reflecting on this, she suggested that perhaps this fear had more to do with ‘the teaching than with the Shakespeare’. She reported how she had been particularly worried about teaching Shakespeare at A-Level and ‘getting the nuances of meaning and I was worried about missing important things, and that I wanted them to enjoy it as well’ (*ibid.*).

Others suggested difficult, and indeed sometimes traumatic, early experiences of teaching. Caro had a large gap between her PGCE and teaching, and described the challenges of going back into the classroom and failing her first term. Fiona characterised early experiences of teaching Shakespeare as a struggle: ‘... the kids weren’t going to enjoy [it], ... I wouldn’t enjoy teaching as such, and so therefore we’d get through it as opposed to enjoying it’ (F1). As indicated in the previous chapter, she bought a personal copy of the *RSC Toolkit* during her NQT year. She described trying some of the approaches ‘but it not really working’, concluding that ‘now I can see that I didn’t frame it particularly well ...we went straight to something that was quite active as opposed to building up any trust within that group ... and as a result it just didn’t work’ (*ibid.*). Ayesha described an even more negative experience during her NQT year. Struggling with a tough year 9 class Ayesha’s department head responded by taking over the teaching of Shakespeare ‘because she didn’t think I was equipped to do that’. Ayesha

reflected on the influence of this experience: 'So my first opportunity to teach Shakespeare was incredibly negative ... and it did put me off a bit, it made me feel like perhaps I don't know my subject'.

## **6.2 *Personal identity***

### **6.2.1 Age, gender, ethnicity and class**

Although there were few references to age, gender, race and class, some interesting findings emerged from the data. Sean was unusual in making references to his own class. He described the area in which he grew up as 'working class', made other references to his family background as being 'very working class' (S1), and also talked about how education had been behind his own personal experience of social mobility. In terms of age, Mary suggested that as a late (and therefore older) entrant to teaching, she had a wealth of prior experiences. She implied that this meant she was now 'big enough' to deal with aspects of teaching Shakespeare that did not work, and try alternatives. Brishti suggested that her age and circumstances freed her up to take advantage of training opportunities offered by the likes of Shakespeare's Globe: 'I'm at a stage of my life where I don't have kids or anything and I will always jump on that' (B1).

Within my sample of seven women and two men, gender was rarely mentioned in a way that suggested it had influenced the experience of teaching Shakespeare, although indications of confidence, or lack of, explored below, may be gender-related. Race was not mentioned by any of the seven white British/American teachers, but clearly had an influence on Ayesha and Brishti. Ayesha made several references to being treated as 'other' when teaching in the home counties, because of her race:

Within the department there was this ... notion that Shakespeare obviously is ... the best thing you can do, or teach even, and I was seen as not worthy of teaching Shakespeare. ... I think a lot of that was tied into race ... it was predominantly white middle class, and my head of department turned round to me at different occasions and said 'well, you're very other; you don't fit in here'.

She explained her sense that even parents felt she 'shouldn't be teaching English ... because you're of a different race'. She contrasted this with her more recent experience of teaching in inner city London:

Ethnicity-wise... I think it works in your favour, if you're not white. It sounds awful, but I think some of the teachers have kind of mentioned that, and I thought "Really?". But then I think because they see you as "oh, you're a bit like us, and you're now doing this", there's a bit more of that "OK we'll cut you some slack".

The influence on Brishti was more about self-identification. Brishti made several references to post-colonial theory as being important to her because 'I would define myself as ... I like to see things through a post-colonial perspective...' (B1). In a separate extract she explained how at university she did not

quite understand Marxism and different types of theory, but I always understood post-colonial theory, because ... that for me was always the point of entry, because it is always to do with the other, and differences.

This had clearly influenced her response to two of Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest* and *Othello*, which she repeatedly referenced as 'my two favourite plays', describing them as 'archetypal plays ... about post-colonial theory'. This translated into enthusiasm to teach these particular plays; for example, when asked to describe her early experiences of teaching Shakespeare she replied 'you would have seen a teacher who was really keen to teach *The Tempest*' (*ibid.*).

## 6.2.2 Personal characteristics *and* preferences

### *Personal responses to Shakespeare*

For Ayesha and Mary, positive family-based childhood experiences of Shakespeare translated into a lifelong love of Shakespeare. Ayesha was the most explicit, describing her ‘massive love affair’ with Shakespeare that started as a child, continued throughout school where she ‘carried on loving Shakespeare’, on to her masters and then her PGCE, where she ‘still wrote about it’. Mary also talked about a positive response to the ‘fabulous’ stories of Shakespeare which she first encountered as a child. What was interesting was that both Mary and Ayesha further characterised their positive responses in terms of absence of negative influences. Mary declared her early experiences as positive precisely ‘because nobody prejudiced me against that when I was quite young. It was never “Oh, you’ve got to do Shakespeare”, sort of imposing Shakespeare’. For her, Shakespeare had always been something ‘that was actually good fun, and not to be scared of’. Ayesha expressed a similar sentiment, describing a childhood ‘sense of respect’ for Shakespeare, but ‘I don’t ever remember there being a fear in the way that lots of people talk about this anxiety at school, and the anxiety that teachers may pass on to their students about doing Shakespeare’.

Four other teachers suggested consistently positive responses to Shakespeare. For example, I have already referenced Caro’s love of seeing productions of Shakespeare’s plays from an early age, whilst Hugh declared ‘I’ve always had a positive view on Shakespeare’ (H1). Dawn also described loving Shakespeare from her first encounter, as did Sean. By contrast, and as already indicated, Fiona, Gina and Brishti described a longer and more difficult journey to a later love of Shakespeare. Fiona declared her love of Shakespeare kicked in during A-Level, whereas for Gina and Brishti it happened at university.

## ***Love of reading***

The literature suggested a love of reading and books features heavily in the identity of English teachers, and unsurprisingly my findings echoed this, with Hugh, Gina, Dawn, Sean and Brishti making explicit references. For example, Gina stated ‘I kind of pity people who don’t read, because I can’t understand how they exist without the internal life, so this is kind of my view of the subject that I have and I wanted to pass that on!’ (G1). Brishti explicitly referenced the significant influence of books: ‘I wanted to be an English teacher because I loved books’ (B2). Love of English as a subject also featured heavily. Hugh explained that he had loved the subject from year 9, and Gina stated that ‘I loved English at school, I’ve always loved it’ (G1).

## ***Love of theatre***

As already referenced, Fiona was quite explicit about how theatre had influenced her interest in Shakespeare. Caro also repeatedly described how ‘I love watching, going to see his plays’ (C1). Both Fiona and Caro highlighted how this had been a significant influence since childhood. When asked later about what might have influenced her use of active and rehearsal-based approaches Caro denied it had anything to do with her university course ‘where it was all reading’ but commented ‘maybe it was because I just saw so much Shakespeare’ (*ibid.*). Mary also suggested the likely influence of theatre on her teaching, at one point explaining that ‘I’m longing to do that scene from *Twelfth Night* in the garden with the letter, because Propeller do that so beautifully with living statues ... that’s a pure drama lesson and I would love to do that with a class’.

Sean frequently mentioned attending performances, bemoaning colleagues who did not, suggesting that he felt theatre was a vital part of teaching English, whilst Brishti also made several references to seeing RSC and Globe productions

of Shakespeare's plays. However, these were not always happy experiences as indicated in her description of seeing the RSC's History Plays:

I sat there and I was just really confused. And that ... makes me feel slightly ... 'why didn't I understand that play?'. I've got a degree in English. ... Most people expect an English teacher – I should be fluent in the works of Shakespeare(B2).

### ***Motivation to teach/love of teaching***

Motivation to teach was a particular question I asked, prompting answers that were considerably varied. Ayesha explained that she had ended up teaching when finances prevented her doing a PhD. However, she reflected 'having said that I do enjoy it and I love the kids'. Mary reported the harrowing experience of the death of her 16 year old daughter half way through her degree and her determination to 'keep going' because otherwise 'I would be letting my daughter down ... that's why I do what I do'. Dawn did not explain initial motivation but reported that she had trained initially as a primary teacher but, due to personal circumstances, ended up in secondary, and that 'It wasn't a conscious decision, "I want to be a secondary school teacher"' (D2). Caro's response was also less straightforward, as she had a twenty year gap between PGCE and her first teaching job, and her motivation appeared as much a backlash against her first career as a desire to teach. By contrast, Fiona explained that, following university 'I wanted to do something that was closely related to my subject' but that also 'I loved school' (F2). Gina's response was similar: 'it was my love of literature and reading' (G2), as was Brishti's. Hugh reported 'enthusiasm and passion for the subject' but linked it to 'the desire ... to help young people improve and pass on that passion to them' (H2). Yet Sean was adamant that

I didn't go in just because I loved my subject. I think teachers who say they are going in because they love their subject must be ... because we don't

teach subjects, we teach children. And I like being around young people, and I like the relationships you can have with them (S2).

All teachers in my sample came across as enjoying or indeed loving their jobs. Dawn explained that 'I just love ... that I'm teaching English all day' (D2). Hugh described teaching as 'an incredibly rewarding profession' (H1); and as indicated above, Ayesha explained that she enjoyed teaching 'and I love the kids', echoing sentiments expressed by Sean. Indeed others in my sample talked explicitly about their love of working with young people. Dawn made two references to how she would never apply for promotion because she wanted to be in the classroom 'engaging with young people' (D2). Hugh repeatedly used the word 'excitement' about 'building' and 'fostering' (H1) relationships with children.

Much of this love of teaching translated into a clear sense of passion, enthusiasm and commitment. Mary described having 'a great deal of enthusiasm', whilst Hugh indicated passion and commitment: 'I love the pressure of that, and I love the success of it, and the fact that it doesn't come overnight, and you've got to really work on it' (H1). Brishti, Dawn and Caro explicitly referenced running after school clubs, a strong indication of commitment. The success of Dawn's after school club with children 'working on Shakespeare performance using active approaches to do *Richard III*' (D2) had led to a recent decision to offer parents the opportunity to participate in workshops in the future as well. Conversely, some in my sample indicated the negative influence of school cultures on enthusiasm and commitment. I have already referenced Ayesha's negative experience of teaching in the home counties. She reflected that 'I just didn't particularly feel that was a place where I wanted to engage or emotionally invest', contrasting it with her experience of teaching in London: 'I've definitely invested far more emotionally here!'

Across the sample there was a strong sense that current experiences were underpinned by enjoyment and/or love of *teaching* Shakespeare, not just a love of Shakespeare himself. Caro declared simply ‘I love teaching Shakespeare’ (C2) whilst Mary consistently talked about wanting to do more Shakespeare. Gina was noticeably more passionate about teaching than studying Shakespeare: ‘I actually really love it now that I teach it, more so than even when I was doing it at degree level’ (G1). What also emerged from the data was lack of enjoyment about having to teach Shakespeare in certain ways. Dawn in particular made repeated references to her hatred of teaching Shakespeare as preparation for tests or exams. As described above, she talked extensively about the negative influence of preparing students for SATs when they existed, describing them as ‘just mind-numbing’ and ‘grim’ (D1).

### ***The relationship between teaching and personal experiences and preferences***

What was interesting was the way in which some teachers’ personal experiences of Shakespeare seemed to be reflected in their expectations of student responses. For example, Brishti found Shakespeare boring as a child, and clearly expected other students to find it boring as well. Brishti told me how she would gleefully use a clip from the British television comedy, *Blackadder*, set at the time of Elizabeth I. Blackadder meets Shakespeare and ‘beats him up’ for the pain he would go on to inflict on future schoolchildren. She explained how she would ask students “‘what’s the message in this?’”, before going on to state “‘You’re not alone, every kid finds it boring, has found it boring...’” (B1). Similarly, Brishti responded to certain texts (in particular *The Tempest* and *Othello*) and theories, such as post-colonialism, which resonated so clearly with her own personal background and those of her students. Her teaching reflected this interest in theories, or ideas. Indeed the word ‘idea’ occurred twenty-one times in her first



interview<sup>26</sup>. For example, she talked about promoting or ‘modelling’ ideas within *The Tempest* ‘because it’s to do with ... the *idea* of colonialism’. Elsewhere she talked about ‘presenting them with the *ideas* and the issues’, how she would ‘introduce these little *ideas*’, or how she would approach plays in terms of ‘... what message am I trying to give the kids ... what are we working towards, and what *idea* do I want them to carry away from it’. Another reference was equally interesting, when Brishti talked about ‘what universal *idea* do I want them to go away with that they can think about?’. In a separate extract, Brishti described the teaching of Shakespeare in terms of it being ‘all about the message you want to present to the kids’ (all B1, my italics). Conversely, references to Shakespeare’s language, which she had explicitly referenced as the thing she found difficult as a child, were minimal, certainly by comparison with others, suggesting that Brishti’s teaching was ideas-led, rather than language-focused.

Similarly, Mary’s early experiences would appear to have heavily influenced her future teaching which, for Mary, resulted in a focus on language. The words ‘read’, and ‘language’ occurred unprompted several times in Mary’s only interview. As part of her descriptions of her early childhood responses to Shakespeare she described how she could ‘read the language’ and how there was a ‘lot of reading’ at school, which focused on ‘just sort of get the sound of the language, the love of the language’. When describing herself as a teacher she talked extensively about getting students to ‘read’ the plays, about helping them to ‘get the feel of the language in their mouths’ and about how she would ‘read it [the text] to them in different ways’. She also expressed her frustrations at the lack of focus on language, as already referenced in the previous chapter, and how her students ‘should be reading it themselves, they should be reading it aloud, they should be... but they’re not at that stage, they need to know the plot, because that’s how they’ve been taught that they need to learn’.

26 These references were almost entirely unprompted; I used the word ‘idea’ once, towards the end of this interview. The word cloud generated by Brishti’s first interview is available in Appendix K.

This contrasted with Caro's approach, which focused heavily on performance:

you have to constantly emphasise the performance and you have to – the fact that it's a text and it's meant to be understood through your ears – not ... through your eyes watching the action, but through your ears for the words (C1).

Caro's belief in the importance of treating Shakespeare as performance, and 'listening' to, rather than reading words was further illustrated when she described how girls in her after school Shakespeare club would be 'reading out lines to themselves and listening for the words and listening to what was happening with the language because that's how it's supposed to be received'. Elsewhere she talked about how 'at least I've got them thinking about words', and when asked if she could change anything about the teaching of Shakespeare she answered 'I would like there to be more emphasis on the play as a text that you listen to' (*ibid.*).

### ***Being different***

Findings suggested that some of my interviewees explicitly or implicitly viewed themselves as different from their fellow English teachers. For example, Mary described herself as

not typical because ... there's a small part of me that's never grown up!  
(Laughter) ... there's a naughtiness to me that I know is there, and I am longing sometimes to just let that out. And that sometimes will just enable me to say 'right, OK, let's chuck the lesson plan out of the window; let's just DO'.

There were also indications of difference in teaching approaches. Hugh and Brishti both suggested strong identification with peers, yet, as indicated in the previous chapter, both acknowledged their teaching was different to their colleagues particularly around the use of active and rehearsal-based approaches.

Caro clearly identified herself as different from the rest of her department, with her repeated references to the word 'they' or 'them'. She talked about how 'None of them teach the way I do. ... I don't think anybody uses the active approaches to the extent that I do, they might do a little bit but I don't think they do as much as I do'.

When pressed about why, she responded: 'I don't think they've come across it. It's too difficult ... they're not interested, they've got too much other stuff to think about, they don't feel confident doing it'. Lack of awareness, interest and confidence were all jumbled up so it was difficult to assess which of these most accurately reflected Caro's peers, but the perception of difference was further enhanced through Caro's descriptions of other English teachers of her generation. She described them as recipients of 'old-fashioned, traditional teaching' influenced by Leavis and A.C. Bradley, with 'the texts as almost entities of themselves, as books that you read and understand in that way and that has ... left an almost indelible mark on English ... in the teaching of Shakespeare through universities'. My interest was in how this might influence Caro, and I probed how she felt as a result, to which she replied with a dismissive air that appeared credible: 'Oh, I don't care. I just don't care' (all C2).

By contrast, others did suggest feeling isolated. Mary gave the impression of fighting against a culture characterised by lack of support for Shakespeare and the approaches she wanted to use. As mentioned previously, Mary suggested that she could not allow her students out of the classroom to undertake drama approaches because of lack of SLT support. She also claimed that there was little time for Shakespeare in her current school 'because of the schemes of work', how it 'tends to get tagged on' but her response 'it doesn't stop me trying sometimes', indicated a determination that was reiterated later in the same extract. She explained:

I feel that I'm not, and it's the way that the school is, and I do work with some incredibly lovely people, but in school we have a lack of space, a lack of resources ... So what I want to do is the best I can with what I've got, and that sort of relies on me being very creative with what I can use and what I need to use.

The phrase 'I do work with some incredibly lovely people, but' again hinted at a sense of difference and isolation. This was also present in some of Gina's descriptions. Elsewhere I have described the tension for Gina of using teaching methods that differed from her students' previous teacher. Again, the word 'but' is telling: 'they had a very good teacher, but a teacher who would do the research, package it up, deliver it to them, they would write it down and remember it, spit it out at exam' (G1). This description suggests a veiled criticism of this approach, particularly the reference to how students would 'spit out' responses in the exam, and contrasted with how Gina described her own teaching, as referenced elsewhere.

### **6.2.3 Identity and experiences characterised by emotion**

The literature had indicated the need to consider what Hargreaves termed 'emotional geographies' (2001). I have already reported the prevalence of love of reading, love of theatre, and love of Shakespeare, and captured reports of student responses which were often characterised in terms of love and hate. Further analysis highlighted emotions associated with personal identities, personal responses, or the responses of those around them. Terms frequently used were love, hate, passion, excitement, frustration, awful, pressure/stress, joy/enjoyment, and sadness. Analysing consistency, depth or variation of feelings provided interesting insights. For example, for all that Ayesha's 'first opportunity to teach Shakespeare was incredibly negative' she appeared consistently positive about her experiences of Shakespeare at her current school, and clearly passionate

about Shakespeare in general. She made no use of the words stress or pressure, and her only reference to sadness related to the department decision reported in the previous chapter to do *Hamlet* rather than *Richard III* at A-Level. All other descriptions were characterised by emotions of love, passion, enjoyment and excitement. As referenced above, Ayesha described a 'love affair' with Shakespeare that started in childhood and made the link between personal lack of anxiety around Shakespeare and teaching: 'I try and pass that on to the students ... I think it's just so important not to be scared by it, because I think that's why I enjoyed it so much'. She reported working with colleagues who feel 'passionately about Shakespeare and Shakespeare teaching'; she described being 'really excited' about teaching *Romeo and Juliet* and students getting 'passionate' in debates about the play.

Similarly, despite referencing English teachers in general as 'the most stressed teachers in schools because of the pressure' (B2) there was little indication that Brishti's sense of identity or experiences were typically negative. Where she did refer to pressure it was, as indicated in the example just given, more about English teachers in general rather than specifically relating to her own personal circumstances. Equally, as referenced in chapter four, she twice linked pressure because of 'the status of English' with positive outcomes: 'whatever demands we make, generally we'll get them' (B2). Brishti made no references to feelings associated with hate, frustration or sadness, and multiple references to love, in the context of books and specific plays. For example she declared 'I love my subject' (B2); as already indicated she described how, at university, 'I loved *The Tempest* and I loved *Othello*' (B1), and, as captured in chapter five, described experiences of students loving some of the work. Fiona was equally positive in her descriptions, with the exception of her reports of initially struggling with Shakespeare, and her 'love of English' not happening until A-Level (F1). Interestingly, all other personal references to love were about the theatre: Fiona

described how she ‘absolutely fell in love with’ (*ibid.*) *The Comedy of Errors*, one of four references to love of theatre, whilst her only reference to being ‘passionate’ related to theatre (F2). The one time she used love to describe student responses was also in the context of theatre: ‘they absolutely loved the production’ of *Twelfth Night* (F2).

Hugh and Sean reported emotions that were mostly positive. Interestingly, Hugh only used the word love to describe teaching in general, not specifically Shakespeare. He described loving the ‘pressure’, ‘and I love the success of it’ (H1), suggesting high levels of job satisfaction. Four times he used the word excitement in terms of feelings about teaching. For example, he reported ‘the biggest source of excitement’ being ‘building that relationship, and fostering that relationship’ with students (H1). He did not use the word hate in the context of his own experience, but four times he expressed himself as sad about the impact of assessment on his teaching: ‘that’s really sad, because it strips out the elements of fun and creativity that I enjoyed as a student’ (H2). Sean frequently referenced his own love of Shakespeare, and reported his ‘passion, interest in the subject, never failing to be surprised, revisiting plays that I thought I knew so well, and always finding something new or different in it’ (S2). Towards the end of his first interview Sean highlighted the depth of his emotional engagement with Shakespeare, and the clear link with his teaching, when he stated that ‘there are lines in Shakespeare’s plays that will haunt me until I die and ... I want kids to have that’ (S1). As indicated previously, he provided several examples of positive student responses to Shakespeare. He described how students ‘really enjoyed’ a recent ‘Shakespeare fest’ and getting ‘really excited’ by drama (S1). He made no reference to stress or pressure, and although he talked about being sad, it was mostly in the context of others’ practice. Three times he reported sadness at the narrowness of play choices in other schools. For example, he described being ‘really sad that lots of schools never ever study *Cymbeline*. There are a lot of

plays which are ignored'. In the same interview he described it as 'heartbreakingly sad' that some English teachers do not read or go to the theatre (S2).

By contrast, Caro, Gina, Dawn, and Mary's experiences appeared more varied. Dawn referenced her love of Shakespeare: 'I just loved it right from the word go' and her job 'I just love the fact that I'm teaching English all day' (D2). She used the term 'hateful' once in the context of some students' experiences of school (D1) but beyond that hate was not a term that characterised her interviews. However, she described being 'sad' because of the pressures of exams and was the only person who specifically used the word stress in reference to her own or her students' experiences. She described teaching Shakespeare for GCSE as 'the most stressful thing I have ever done' and how 'it was stressful for them [students] ... there was no enjoyment at all.' (D2). Caro's early career experiences had been 'awful, it was absolutely awful ... I have never, ever, had a year like that ... just unspeakably horrible' (C1). By contrast, Caro reflected on her current feelings, and the impact on students: 'I love teaching Shakespeare, absolutely ... maybe that's why they're so engaged' (C2). Indeed, as already indicated, Caro was emphatic about the positive nature of student responses, talking about how they 'absolutely love' aspects of the Shakespeare classroom, particularly the 'workshop approach' (C1). Caro's experience also threw the spotlight on the influence of colleagues' emotional responses to Shakespeare. She reported the enthusiasm of the current drama teacher, and indicated how it affected her experience of teaching Shakespeare: 'she loves Shakespeare ... we're working out a schedule ... so that we can dovetail what we're doing' (C1). Yet Caro recounted the exact opposite experience: 'I do believe we get teachers nowadays who ... I teach with someone who hates Shakespeare ... hates teaching Shakespeare ... hates getting involved with Shakespeare (C1)'. As already indicated, Caro also reported how previously 'the drama department ... has hated Shakespeare' (C1).



Mary's experience was equally varied. In terms of love, she recalled being encouraged to acquire a 'love of the language' at school, but she mostly used the word 'love' in the context of students' responses to active and rehearsal-based approaches, as reported previously. She made a number of references to personal enjoyment of theatre productions of Shakespeare's plays, and Shakespeare being 'a big part of the curriculum that I actually enjoy teaching', a reference that suggests perhaps other aspects of teaching were less enjoyable. Indeed, other references to feelings were more negative, for example her descriptions of sadness about lack of space in her current school, or being 'under tremendous pressure' because of progress targets. She made a specific reference to her motivation to teach being driven by the death of her daughter, and the consequent effect on her teaching: 'that's why I get frustrated when kids won't learn'. Whilst she referred to her 'enjoyment' of teaching Shakespeare she reported her 'feeling ... that the joy has gone out of learning'. Yet her interview was characterised by much laughter, and joyful references to her 'naughtiness' re-enforcing a sense of varied emotions.

Gina's emotional responses were equally varied. Her love of English and reading has already been indicated. However, her circumstances suggested conflicting emotions about her personal love of English, her preferred style of teaching, and her role and experiences as an English teacher. As referenced previously she described how 'the very reason I love English, the very reason I became an English teacher actually isn't taught in schools like mine' (G1). In the second interview she went further: 'Effectively my attitude to English Language GCSE is just get the bloody thing done and get it done as well as you can. I don't really enjoy teaching it... I think it kills my subject that I love because it's not literature really' (G2). Tensions between her love of literature and experiences of teaching English were, as also indicated, exacerbated by tensions over pedagogy. Gina clearly wanted to adopt more student-led pedagogies, yet 'unhappily' found



herself 'trying to be a facilitator' but ending up 'being the opposite' (G2).

Similarly, her experience of teaching Shakespeare in KS3, where active and rehearsal-based approaches were 'the one thing' that 'did improve students' enjoyment' was contrasted with A-Level students who 'hated it, absolutely hated it' when asked to approach Shakespeare as performance (G1).

## **6.2.4 Knowledge, confidence and skills**

Amongst my sample, all had done English or English and drama degrees, yet the findings suggested that knowledge, confidence and skills were still very varied. As already indicated, Gina made a number of references to Shakespeare being something she was 'concerned about' in her early career 'in terms of my own abilities' (G1). By contrast, Sean appeared confident in terms of both subject knowledge and teaching skills. He described himself as 'very confident when it comes to teaching Shakespeare ... I'm quite happy at walking in ... with perhaps less preparation than younger teachers because I've done it before, and I can just go in and do it' (S2). Elsewhere he described Ofsted and performance management observations of his teaching over the years: 'every single time I've got a 1. Every single time. That's got to be some kind of record. I'm pretty good at it. I do well on it' (S1).

Those in my sample who talked specifically about subject knowledge tended to focus on knowledge of particular plays. Brishti explained that 'there are a core set of texts that I know very well, and they will all come down to texts I studied at GCSE, A-Level and from my degree' (B2). Caro described herself as 'fairly knowledgeable about some plays' (C2). Hugh reported how 'being a subject specialist gives the confidence that you're sort of teaching the right thing', explaining that when

you move on to teach a more challenging text, that pupils find more challenging, like Shakespeare ... you have that greater confidence within

yourself and I think ... the students pick up on that confidence and they're more willing to go with you, and more willing to trust you when you deliver Shakespeare (H2).

There were many examples that indicated or implied confidence. For example, Hugh described 'being an idiot up on desks, pretending I'm Shakespeare in the 1500s', offering a clear picture of a teacher with confidence both in Shakespeare and classroom management. Hugh reported 'having the confidence to sort of go with it', adding that 'You'll try – more so with Shakespeare, you try things, and sometimes they'll absolutely fly and other times they'll fall flat' (H1), suggesting that Hugh's confidence partly manifested itself through a willingness to experiment and take risks. Elsewhere, Sean conveyed confidence in his storytelling: 'Well I'm a great storyteller' (S2), whilst Mary suggested confidence in her statement about being 'happy to walk into a classroom with nothing, other than a pile of books, if I need to'. Similarly, Ayesha talked about being 'perfectly happy to throw out a lesson I've planned' in order to allow students to explore ideas emerging within the lesson. On a separate occasion she referenced a spontaneous change in her teaching of *Othello*, deciding to abandon her initial plans so that students could read the entire play, which was all the more interesting given her earlier references to the problem of accountability: 'I don't care if you write nothing in your books, we're just going to read the play'.

Some teachers made a specific link between confidence and experiences of success. Both Sean and Hugh related their confidence to success as measured by results and Ofsted. As indicated above, Sean referred to success within Ofsted and performance management observations. He also reported being part of a group who were 'getting better results' (S1) than colleagues, and how Ofsted's national lead for English had recently visited the school and praised the way Shakespeare was being taught. Hugh mentioned experiencing success in terms of student responses and grades and how that 'gives you the confidence that you

understand it, you're teaching them the right things' (H1), although it was not clear whether Hugh was talking specifically about Shakespeare or English more generally. There were also examples of how confidence had developed through experience. Brishti explained that 'I'm 100% confident with *Romeo and Juliet* because I've been teaching it every single year' (B2), whilst Fiona explained that 'involvement with the LPN' had given her department 'the confidence to widen the breadth of plays that our students have the experience of' (F2).

References to skills tended to focus on absence rather than presence, and mostly focused on drama skills. For example, Brishti volunteered that: 'I think most teachers would like to use drama but ... we don't have the right skills to do this and that's the kind of barrier' (B2). Sean echoed this with his view that

all too often at secondary school ... drama is often taught by non-specialists, and sadly by English teachers who are not drama specialists ... there are a lot of well-meaning English teachers who have a go at drama that I don't think do it that well (S2).

Caro described herself as not having 'any concerns about teaching Shakespeare' but then qualified that by adding 'Possibly I have concerns' and went on to describe a lack of confidence 'about finding active approaches into a play that I don't know particularly well. But then I'm not a drama teacher, and I think that's where ... my understanding of drama techniques ... is weak' (C2). What was interesting was that despite the MA Caro had undertaken, some of it at Shakespeare's Globe, she still felt she needed 'a better understanding of drama techniques generically' (*ibid.*), in order to be able to apply them to Shakespeare.

Much of this mirrored Gina's fears about teaching Shakespeare, some of which she suggested stemmed from a fear of 'teaching it as ... drama. Because that was something I was quite nervous about, as well. I knew I wasn't a drama teacher, I wasn't trained in drama, I don't know any drama activities' (G1). Yet Gina added

that she had acquired the necessary skills and confidence within her first two years of teaching. Thomas, interviewed in the pilot, concurred that the main area he lacked knowledge and confidence was around using drama in the English classroom. He stated that he wanted ‘to be more confident’ using drama, that ‘we do have to use drama techniques’ but that he had never had any training.

## **6.3 *Personal philosophies***

### **6.3.1 The purpose of education and English**

Sean and Gina were rare in linking the teaching of Shakespeare with wider perspectives on the purpose of education. Sean explained how many parents had a ‘very functional view of education: “you do this because it leads to this, and you will do this job”’. By contrast, he suggested that his school was trying to show students that ‘there are alternatives’. Indeed Sean repeatedly talked about education as a means of opening up possibilities, claiming that ‘Shakespeare’s good for that’. He also talked about wanting his students ‘to be able to drop Shakespeare into your conversation... as a sign of an all round educated person’ (all S1). Gina described having had similar views to Sean, but was now resigned to her school dropping English Literature in order to focus on the more functional elements of education, reflecting that ‘I’ve kind of had the romanticism about literature ... bootied out of me’ (G1).

### **6.3.2 The politics of teaching, identity, and cultural heritage**

Shakespeare’s relationship to national identity, cultural heritage and entitlement featured heavily in the literature. All nine teachers were broadly supportive of teaching Shakespeare as part of a cultural heritage model, regardless of students’ backgrounds. Brishti, teaching in inner city London, firmly believed in teaching

Shakespeare as part of a 'national identity' (B1) whilst Sean spoke in terms of 'a moral imperative to teach children Shakespeare if they don't know anything about the country they're living in' (S2), a view echoed by Ayesha. Yet, with the exception of Sean, Brishti and Caro, there were no references to the link made between politics, curriculum and pedagogy as outlined in the literature. Sean however made several references to his interest in politics, which was clearly related to how he identified with his role as an English teacher. At one point he declared 'if there's one thing an English teacher should do it's make kids think about politics. Without brandishing a particular version of it'. He declared his belief that Shakespeare is

a wonderful tool for kids to study about citizenship. What it means to take part in society ... Kids can't sit and be spectators in their own lives. And that's something you really get in Shakespeare. Don't sit and let something bad happen, stand up, do what's right (S1).

Sean was also unusual in showing an awareness of the inter-relationship between socio-politics and cultural heritage, declaring himself to be 'very, very suspicious though about the way government selects its heritage' (S2). Likewise, Caro described her view that 'you can't pass on cultural heritage without having a political view of it' (C2). Brishti demonstrated an awareness of the complexities around determining who qualifies for inclusion in a 'canon of great literature' by commenting 'I know it's a question of who defines the canon' but went on to assert her view 'I think it's really important for you to know ... about your heritage, the heritage of a particular country or identity' (B1).

### **6.3.3 Beliefs about teaching Shakespeare**

I specifically questioned teachers on whether they would continue to teach Shakespeare if it was not compulsory, and all confirmed without any hesitation that they would. However, when I also asked whether, if they had control over

government policy, they would keep Shakespeare as compulsory, there was greater variation. Analysing these responses indicated a range of beliefs about Shakespeare, many of which focused on a belief in the importance of Shakespeare, but not exclusively. Ayesha confirmed her commitment to teaching Shakespeare:

it's to do with the language ... the history ... even in popular culture, he always crops up ... I think Shakespeare is important within kind of a cultural psyche, and it's part of these students' development to have exposure to that, but I don't know if I think it should be made compulsory in the way that it was made compulsory.

Ayesha's concern was around a sense of exclusivity, of marginalising other writers. Caro echoed this sentiment, as did Sean who declared that 'Shakespeare is massively important, but so are ... other literature too' (S1).

### **6.3.4 Philosophies expressed through desired change**

As referenced in chapter three, I asked three 'what if' questions, similar to 'imaginative variation' (Bevan, 2014). Due to time pressures or absence of second interview, Hugh and Ayesha were not asked these questions. Responses from the remaining seven were all from first interviews. They offered interesting insights into personal philosophies, given that questions focused on what they would change if they had greater control over curriculum, assessment, or Shakespeare in their school. Desired change within the curriculum and school Shakespeare fell into a number of overlapping categories. Brishti, Dawn, Fiona and Mary talked about wanting more Shakespeare at primary. Brishti suggested 'starting Shakespeare as early as possible' (B1); similarly Fiona wanted to 'bring in more Shakespeare at KS1 and KS2' (F1). Dawn 'would start in Reception ... and make it a feature of every single school year ... using the rehearsal room techniques' (D1). Similarly, Mary wanted 'to see, at primary, Shakespeare taught as actively

as possible' whilst at the beginning of secondary she wanted year 7s 'to do a performance of a Shakespeare play'. Sean aspired to do more Shakespeare in general, whilst Caro discussed other playwrights and wanted to do 'more of a lot of things including Shakespeare' (C1). Mary and Fiona wanted more cross-curricular approaches; Fiona and Brishti wanted a Shakespeare week. Gina was the only one who wanted to increase access to 'spaces when you ... do drama' (G1) whilst Mary was the sole person to reference changing texts and purchasing new resources. Fiona made a general comment: 'I'd just be more ambitious with what we do' (F1).

Potential changes to assessment either focused on speaking and listening, or performance. Mary wanted students to be able to discuss a script; Sean wanted to 'insist on a ... speaking and listening element' (S1), a view echoed by Dawn. Brishti considered a re-introduction of assessing 'reading orally' (B1) at GCSE but felt there was no alternative to essays, coursework and exams at A-Level. By contrast, Caro, Fiona and Gina focused on performance. Caro wanted 'more emphasis on the play as a text' (C1); Gina wanted students to 'engage with it as a performance more' (G1), which mirrored Fiona's perspective.

Further interesting insights into personal philosophies emerged when prompted about what differences these changes might make. Mary felt that through discussing scripts students would 'have to think about the language ... more than if you just analyse it and write down your response'. Furthermore, she felt that starting with Shakespeare productions would stop 'people being scared of it. If they're not scared of it then we can ... study it in class'. Dawn's response was similar, suggesting that rehearsal-based approaches at primary would lead to 'massive differences' in 'confidence' and the way students approach 'challenging language', concluding that, 'I'm already seeing that in my students. And I think if they had started when they were five ... what a difference that would make' (D1).



Brishti specifically linked a Shakespeare week with her perception that ‘national identity is really important for kids, especially in a multicultural society’. She then went on to suggest that, through such a week, ‘You’re not presenting this as a boring old text, it’s about the choices, the characters, situations, language’ (B1), again emphasising her concern that students find Shakespeare boring. Fiona reflected on her desire to be more ambitious by suggesting aspirational benefits. She talked about the barriers in students’ perceptions, seeing Shakespeare on a ‘pedestal’, and how focusing on an ‘aspirational point of view’ would be the opposite of ‘bringing Shakespeare down to your level’ and instead ‘you’re aspiring to be at that level’ (F1). Sean made the link between speaking and listening and future employment:

It’s really important that we get kids using lots of drama in schools so that they’re confident in giving presentations. We don’t know what jobs kids are going to be doing in 20 years time... But if they can’t speak to people ... they’re going to go into pretty functional jobs (S1).

Again, many of these responses highlighted the ways in which personal philosophies are not only integral to the Shakespeare teacher but highly varied.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This final findings chapter analysed data relating to influences and variations in terms of the highly individual personal circumstances underpinning experiences of teaching Shakespeare. As highlighted within the literature review, the personal identity, life history and philosophies of those teaching Shakespeare has been a neglected area. Yet the data revealed the centrality of personal characteristics to the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. What emerged were clear links between personal experiences of childhood and school Shakespeare, and one’s own teaching. Mary’s focus on language, for example, appeared to trace right back to childhood exposure and interests. The role of



personal identity shone through in some of those I interviewed, perhaps most strongly with Brishti and her strong sense of identification with certain plays and post-colonial theory, due to her own heritage. Equally strong was the influence of personal philosophies on teaching. Sean's clear commitment to using Shakespeare as a means of opening up possibilities, echoed in Fiona's belief in using Shakespeare to raise aspirations, appeared to be strong influences on how they taught, and the types of experiences they wanted students to have. Their determination to take students out of their schools was a clear example, which in turn affected their lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. Thus the entire chapter supported the claim made by Day and Leitch, cited in chapter one, that '... to neglect the stories of teaching and the narratives of teachers' experiences may be to collude in oversimplification and distortion' (Day & Leitch, 2001:407). The neglected, but critically important role of the personal was one of my key findings, as discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter presents findings in the context of the literature, considering shared and contrasting themes emerging from both. In most instances my data reflected the literature in terms of broad socio-political contexts, and the first section is therefore relatively brief. What is less well documented is the extent to which local contexts affect the experiences of teaching Shakespeare; this appeared clearly within my data and is therefore discussed in some detail. Similarly, although many findings around professional contexts echoed the wider education literature, their specificity to *Shakespeare* warranted detailed discussion. Finally, as argued consistently throughout my research, studies into the teaching of Shakespeare rarely consider the role and influence of the personal, which is therefore discussed in some detail at the end of this chapter.

### 7.1 Socio-political influences

#### 7.1.1 A culture of hyper-accountability

Many studies paint a bleak picture of England's education system in the grip of neoliberalism (for example, Clarke, 2013; Bailey & Ball, 2016). The suggestion of a culture of hyper-accountability (Mansell, 2007; 2011) was reflected strongly within my findings. Seven teachers described the constraints and intense pressures of Ofsted, league tables and performance management. Brishti's claim that English teachers are probably 'the most stressed ... in schools because of the pressure' echoed studies which suggest that 'Policy frequently presents English as the basis of education, placing its successful delivery at the foundation of success and failure within the entire school' (Wood, 2014:5). Furthermore, both literature and data indicate that the culture of accountability manifests itself not just at school and policy level, but through intense media scrutiny. James and

Pollard reflected on interviews with teachers who reported feeling ‘constrained by the press for rapid ‘curriculum coverage’, ‘teaching to the test’ and a ‘tick box culture’ (2011:311). Brishti’s reflections suggest this might be particularly acute for English teachers with her assertion that ‘There are more articles written about the state of English’ than other subjects. However, two teachers made scant reference to accountability. Mary appeared more preoccupied with local rather than national constraints whilst Sean made several references to positive experiences of Ofsted and performance management, which is at odds with the literature.

### **7.1.2 Curriculum and assessment**

Many studies suggest current education policies privilege certain subjects over others (Coles, 2013a, *inter alia*). Isaacs (2014) cited multiple studies indicating that assessment further narrows the curriculum and, as already indicated, Coles (2003, 2009) and Sinfield (1994) have been particularly critical about the disproportionate influence of assessment on the teaching of Shakespeare. Nothing in my data contradicted the notion of curriculum and assessment as profoundly influential, as evidenced by Dawn’s description of the ‘GCSE machine’, her volunteered references to KS3 SATs as ‘the death of the soul’ five years after their removal, and the stark contrast between teaching approaches at KS3 and KS4. Similarly, Hugh’s account of students studying the same Shakespeare play from year 9 to year 11, with work ‘purely focused on what they’ll need to do for the exam’ further demonstrates the extent to which assessment influences, and narrows, experiences for both students and teachers alike. Ayesha’s reference to ‘reductive’ teaching and Caro’s description of the ‘pressure of assessment and grades’ as an ‘indelible shadow that you can never escape from’ also echo claims in the literature.

However, a statement worth closer investigation was Coles' assertion that assessment:

is likely to intrude in such a way as to close down the classroom as a social space and to impose its own form of pedagogic practice, more concerned with information and rules rather than interpretation and experimentation (2009:47).

Yet Fiona made multiple references to her classroom as a social and experimental space throughout all key stages with, for example, her report of lessons being 'full of their [students'] own interpretations'. Mary's references appeared to suggest the same. For Sean and Brishti, there was a strong sense of working within assessment requirements, but without necessarily being bound by 'information and rules'. This was exemplified in Sean's claim that 'I have to teach for an exam, but that doesn't mean I can't do that the way I want to do it' and Brishti's report that, once 'the doors are shut in the classroom ... we all teach our subject the way we want to teach our subject'. Nevertheless, other examples suggest a more complex picture. Sean's reference to being in a league table game and Brishti's report of pressures indicate times when the constraints of curriculum and assessment did indeed impact on their teaching.

### **7.1.3 Shakespeare and 'cultural baggage'**

Some of the socio-political influences described above relate to secondary teaching of English in general. Whilst clearly important, what emerged from the literature and data is that teachers of *Shakespeare* appear to experience considerable pressures *in addition to* the ones summarised above, due in part to conflicting and contradictory attitudes and emotions associated with Shakespeare's 'cultural baggage' (Coles, 2013b:286). For example, extensive media coverage of the teaching of Shakespeare (Bennett, 2010; Boustead, 2013; Gove, 2013b; Gardner, 2015; Cassidy, 2016) reported in this research, suggests

that it is always newsworthy, adding further to the pressures described above. In addition, students' 'deep seated negative attitudes to Shakespeare' (Galloway & Strand, 2010:25), appear to be a very specific feature of the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. Both the literature (Wright, 2005; Martindale, 2008) and my data suggest these attitudes pre-date actual teaching. Fiona's reference to 'trying to overcome the groan' when the word Shakespeare was mentioned, Mary's assertion that students enter the Shakespeare classroom with negative 'preconceived ideas', and Caro's claim that Shakespeare prompted negativity 'before they even hit my lesson' indicate how widely spread this experience is. Ayesha's description of a 'fear of the unknown' and 'student baggage' echo Coles' claim; whether the 'baggage' is Shakespeare's or the students', what is clear is that the Shakespeare classroom starts at a disadvantage.

Thus part of the phenomenon is the prevalence of pre-existing negative attitudes which appear to reflect wider societal attitudes. Dawn and Sean's suggestion of a cultural acceptability of not liking Shakespeare echoed Wright who proposed that 'many children come to Shakespeare with the received attitude that he's alien, ancient and difficult' and 'know by cultural osmosis that he's boring' (*ibid.*:5). There is a sense that this is mostly taken for granted, both in contemporary English classrooms and society at large. Perhaps precisely because of this, the impact on teachers' personal and professional experiences is poorly documented. Yet findings suggest that student attitudes, and attempts to overcome them, play a particularly important role, influencing all aspects of planning, purpose and delivery, as discussed below.

## **7.2 The influence of location and demographics**

The picture of English society depicted in some of the literature (for example, Said, 1993) of cultural imperialism, an elite who appreciate Shakespeare, and a

majority who do not, was not only refuted by Bate (1997) but masks important societal differences in terms of location and demographic. Thomson acknowledged 'The importance of context', reflecting on reports that talk

in generalities, as if all schools are the same. This is clearly not the case. Each school has a particular history, a specific population and staff, and serves a distinct community/ies and localities and student population (2010:66).

Certainly my data reflected this, emphasising that some experiences can only be understood in relation to specific local contexts and demographics. Location appeared to play a highly influential role for those teachers in or close to London. Few studies have analysed the influence of location as it specifically relates to the teaching of Shakespeare, although Marshall's study of English teachers (2000b) suggested a possible, though slight, connection between London and certain teacher types. For Sean, teaching Shakespeare was clearly not just integral to literature, but part of what is elsewhere referred to as an 'area-based' curriculum<sup>27</sup>. His statement 'how blind would we be if we didn't do Shakespeare when he's on our doorstep?' indicated his views on incorporating local assets and opportunities into teaching. Brishti's frequent references to taking up opportunities offered by Shakespeare's Globe was another example of how the experience of London's cultural offer cannot be underestimated.

For those teachers *in* London, experiences appeared to reflect literature on the 'London effect', whereby 'Disadvantaged pupils perform better in Inner London than in other regions' (Greaves *et al.*, 2014). As indicated in chapter two, some linked this to a specific initiative, the London Challenge. However, Greaves *et al.* ascribed this to the impact of the literacy strategies<sup>28</sup> which were piloted in many

27 See: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/creative-learning-and-development-folder/area-based-curriculum>.

28 Government run National Strategies which ran from 1997 – 2011.

London boroughs, whilst Burgess attributed success to ‘the children of immigrants typically hav[ing] high aspirations and ambitions, and plac[ing] greater hopes in the education system than the locals do’ (2014:16). My albeit limited findings appear to support the latter, suggesting a link between location and student/parent aspirations. Ayesha and Brishti, both inner London teachers, described far more consistently positive experiences of student and parental attitudes to education and Shakespeare than others in my sample. Ayesha’s report of student motivation to learn because of attitudes ‘at home that you must do well, because you have to lift yourselves up out of poverty’ was entirely consistent with Burgess’ findings. Similarly, Brishti referred to parental support: ‘because it’s Shakespeare, it sounds serious, and it sounds like an essential requirement’. These experiences contrasted with others; for example Caro reported parents describing Shakespeare as ‘a waste of time’, a view echoed in Hugh’s experiences.

Elsewhere, my findings presented a less clear link between location, demographic and aspiration. Gina suggested a poverty of aspiration amongst her students; she reported that her experience was of teaching in an area with ‘no culture of reading’ which directly influenced her teaching, as evidenced by her statement ‘It’s the kids in front of me...That’s the main thing that affects how I’m going to teach’. This was a view echoed by Dawn who suggested her students were ‘disaffected’ and caught in a ‘poverty ... cycle’ associated with not valuing education. Yet the literature indicates a more nuanced and less well understood picture around aspiration and background, and that current policy rhetoric is misleading in suggesting that low aspirations are directly associated with disadvantage (Baker *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, some in my sample indicated low aspirations despite more affluent demographics. Ayesha criticised motivation and aspiration, characterising student attitudes at her first school amongst an affluent demographic in the home counties as ‘laissez-faire’. This was echoed by

Caro, also teaching in the home counties, who described students wanting to be ‘spoon-fed’.

Finally, the pressures of hyper-accountability reported above appeared within the data to be exacerbated in schools labelled by Ofsted as struggling or failing, indicated by Allen *et al.* as disproportionately serving disadvantaged communities (2012). Further research highlights inequality of access to a rich and broad curriculum for students in such schools (Allen *et al.*, 2016). Their findings suggest these schools choose or feel compelled to focus on a narrowly-defined ‘core’ curriculum, squeezing out other subjects in order to improve results. This is particularly worrying given the extensively researched AHRC Cultural Value Project<sup>29</sup> which highlighted that engagement in arts activities appears to be ‘particularly positive for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds’ (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016:116).

Gina and Dawn’s experiences reflected the findings from Allen *et al.*’s research with, for example, Gina’s description of GCSE English Literature being removed completely from her school, which served an already disadvantaged community. Dawn’s experience was of a narrowing of approaches rather than content. Her descriptions of the entire school embracing active and rehearsal-based approaches across the curriculum at KS3, yet abandoning them at KS4 in favour of a very ‘rigid’ approach suggests two probable explanations. One is that the school was starkly adhering to the notion of a hierarchy of teaching approaches. An alternative, more likely, explanation is that the school was reacting to the pressures of being in ‘special measures’ (the lowest Ofsted ranking). Dawn attributed this to the school’s ‘abysmal results’ due to its very disadvantaged intake. Under such intense pressure it appears that the school felt that active and rehearsal-based approaches were too risky as preparation for GCSE English,

29 See: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/culturalvalueproject/>.



given the latter's importance to Ofsted and league tables. This would appear to reflect Mortimore's assertion that 'Heads I've spoken to over the years have said I'd love to do so and so but ... Ofsted are coming in and it's just too risky, so they play safe' (interviewed in Bangs *et al.*, 2011:137). It would also appear to corroborate Bailey and Ball's assertion that not only did the curriculum narrow under England's coalition government, but so did pedagogy, with a greater focus on more traditional pedagogies (2016).

## **7.3 Professional influences**

### **7.3.1 School cultures and leadership**

There is a significant body of research into the influence on teachers of school cultures and the critical role of leadership (Day *et al.*, 2006; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008; Sammons *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, school leadership has been explicitly referenced as crucial to effective teacher CPDL (Thomson *et al.*, 2010; DfE, 2016). However, very little has focused on the specific and influential role of leaders with regards to teaching Shakespeare. A recent, and as yet unpublished, article goes some way to addressing this gap, even though the focus is primary not secondary. Winston and Parvoti (2017) examined whole school change within two schools associated with the RSC's LPN. They identified positive influences of leaders' individual enthusiasm and support, and commitment to teacher CPDL both in terms of practice and time. Their research further highlighted the important relationship between individual leader and whole school culture, describing atmospheres of collaboration, co-operation and trust.

Their findings chimed with my data, suggesting leaders have a profoundly influential role on choice and use of teaching approaches, and creating the climate in which all other relationships struggle or thrive. For example, Dawn and Sean, reflecting on the positive impact of working within environments

supportive of Shakespeare, commented explicitly on the role of their headteachers. They painted strong pictures of a collegiate approach, which would appear to stem from the culture created by their headteachers, enabling the teaching of Shakespeare to flourish. Sean's frequent use of the word 'we' was particularly telling; for example, his statement that 'Shakespeare's one of the people we target, because ... it's so important to us personally' indicated a strong whole school culture of support. Just as convincing was Dawn's description of her theatrical realisation of the storm in *The Tempest*. Use of space, inclusion of noise, change in dynamic between teacher and students, were all clearly supported by her headteacher.

Yet they were the only two to make anything but passing references to their headteachers; amongst the other seven, leaders were either shadowy presences at best, or oppressive at worst. This is one of the areas in which my findings build on pre-existing studies by looking not only at positive experiences of school leadership on the teaching of Shakespeare, but also negative ones. Indeed, the connection between negative school cultures and approaches to teaching Shakespeare was strongly evidenced through Mary's experience. Her interview was underpinned by sadness and frustration, much of it directed at her current school. In fact, in contrast to others who talked about the constraints of curriculum and assessment, Mary's references were mostly in relation to policies and practices specific to her school. She volunteered the word 'constraint' six times, for example in her reference to the 'constraints of the classrooms that I'm teaching in'. Her clear regret about 'the way that the school is' appeared particularly acute because it clearly differed from the culture of her previous school where she had been 'lucky' in being 'allowed to explore, to experiment'. Mary's experience of senior leaders challenging students if engaged in activities outside the classroom clearly differed from her previous school, where she described students going off with video cameras to make films about *Macbeth*.

Mary's frustration was not only with the management culture, but also colleagues. Her reports of being 'held back' by their views and teaching approaches highlights the potential for fellow teachers to act as negative rather than positive influences, as reflected in Ayesha's experiences, discussed in the later section on personal identity. By contrast, Hugh demonstrated the extent to which colleagues can act as a positive influence, with his detailed descriptions of support through 'other teachers and how they've delivered Shakespeare'. That the data reflect such extremes is a strong example of quite how varied individual teachers' experiences can be, and the extent to which (un)supportive relationships influence practice. The research of Gu and Day (2013) had highlighted positive influences relating to colleagues and leadership support; absence of support is clearly influential as well. Variation in relationships with drama teachers was also evident in the data. Hugh and Ayesha's experiences echoed studies suggesting separation between English and drama departments (Ofsted, 2005; Pitfield, 2011), yet Sean, Gina, Dawn and Fiona's experiences were the opposite. What was particularly interesting was the aversion to Shakespeare which Caro reported, where the previous drama department had 'hated Shakespeare'. That this is typical was highlighted at a conference<sup>30</sup> where a speaker did a comic impersonation of a drama teacher being horrified at the notion they might teach Shakespeare on the grounds that 'I'm a drama teacher'. The laughter indicated widespread knowledge of the stereotype.

### **7.3.2 Compliance and agency**

As explored in chapter two, some research proposed that, despite stringent government controls on education, schools and teachers still have a strong element of agency (Archer, 1996; Alexander, 2008). Yet Alexander has suggested that many fail to recognise this, and instead have succumbed to a 'culture of compliance' (*ibid.*:2). Goodwyn echoes this when he specifically targets English

30 ResearchEd English and Modern Foreign Languages Conference, April 2017.

teachers with a complaint of 'passive conformity' (2012a:50). However, these assertions have been contradicted by some newer studies, particularly around signs of agency exercised by Free Schools (for example Birbalsingh, 2016). Nevertheless, Dawn and Gina's narratives indicate experiences of conformity and compliance, and offer further insights into the impact of local demographics. In their schools, neither lone figures such as Gina and her department head, or whole schools such as Dawn's were strong enough to withstand the external pressures described above. However, the terms 'passive' and 'compliance' do not appropriately reflect the wearied concession of defeat after long battles as suggested by Gina's experience. Furthermore, in this example, conformity came from senior leadership, not individual English teachers. Thus Gina's experience of conformity was forced on her, rather than consciously or subconsciously chosen. Whether the same could be said for Dawn and her school was unclear.

Yet the threat, or in Dawn's case the consequences, of an Ofsted inspection was a tangible influence. Mary's experience corroborated this sense of Ofsted and results as underpinning notions of compliance, and severely compromising teacher agency. Her description of English being 'bashed' by 'poor results', of new policies that expected all teachers 'to teach the same thing at the same time' had clear consequences on her experience, as demonstrated by her statement 'I think that's taken the sort of freedom away from the teaching'. Thus compliance or agency appears to be yet another characteristic affected by local circumstances. The agency that Sean and Brishti described, when they talked about a sense of freedom to teach as they wish 'when the doors are shut in the classroom' may simply reflect that their schools were in less challenging circumstances. Yet the extent to which teachers were aware of their agency was unclear, possibly verifying Alexander's claim that teachers 'excuse or underplay their own agency' (2008:17).

### 7.3.3 Expectations of students

Even accounting for the real or perceived constraints of certain demographics indicated above, teachers and schools exercise a strong element of agency in terms of their *expectations* of students. What was noteworthy was that not one teacher suggested that Shakespeare was inappropriate, or irrelevant, regardless of student ability or demographic. Yet expectations of what was deemed appropriate *in terms of teaching content* varied considerably, even across schools with similar demographics. These expectations were frequently referenced, though often as an aside, as indicated in Brishti's description of 'tailor[ing] your teaching of Shakespeare to the kids you've got', and commenting on how teachers and students might be expected to approach Shakespeare differently if they were in a 'traditional private school'. Variations in approaches to Shakespeare's texts can be seen as indicators of individual and whole school expectations of student abilities. Ayesha *expected* that even her lower ability year 10 students could tackle a whole text; Brishti *expected* that her students would not be able to cope with a whole play until A-Level. Gina *expected* her students to have low literacy levels, and that this would impact on enjoyment. Yet Dawn *expected* her SEN students to use only original text, albeit heavily edited, and related several examples of student engagement.

The link between high, or low, teacher expectations and student achievement is well-established in the literature. Muijs *et al.* summarised wider research which consistently suggested that 'teachers' expectations of their pupils can become a self-fulfilling prophecy' (2014:235). Others have cited multiple studies indicating lower expectations 'in schools with greater proportions of ethnic minority, lower socioeconomic, or lower academic capability students' (Brault *et al.*, 2014:150). Their research also highlighted the influence of school climate, or culture, on teacher expectations, yet again reinforcing the crucial role of school leadership. Yet further research indicated a link between teacher expectations and student

gender (Jones & Myhill, 2004), and ethnicity (Strand, 2012). Thus teacher expectations when it comes to Shakespeare matter deeply. Nearly 25 years ago Gibson raised concerns around expectations: 'Shakespeare is difficult. But much more of each play is accessible to most school-age pupils than is generally believed' (1993:85). More recently, Coles observed a teacher 'unintentionally convey[ing] the impression that unmediated Shakespeare is extraordinarily difficult, beyond the capabilities of these students' (2013b:211).

All the above suggest strong parallels with the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière. In his seminal book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), Rancière argued that notions of *equality* rather than *inequality* should be the start-point for education. This is reflected in the experience of Jacotot (the ignorant schoolmaster of the title), his 'startling (or naive?) presupposition' that 'All people are equally intelligent' (Ross, 1991:xix). However, Pelletier reported Rancière's accusation that, in reality, the education system treats 'a lack of instruction as an incapacity... The perpetual re-making of incapacity, as the student moves up the educational ladder, is what the education system terms individual progress' (2009:144).

Expectations of student abilities in the context of Shakespeare are re-enforced through curriculum and assessment association of certain plays with different age groups, which is at odds with Rancière's philosophy. For example, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* regularly featured within SATs and GCSE assessments, whilst *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* have tended to be considered A-Level material<sup>31</sup>. Yet Sean clearly rejected this approach, with his descriptions of teaching *Hamlet* in year 7, and *King Lear* at GCSE. It can be no coincidence that Sean saw teaching, and Shakespeare, as a way to challenge low expectations and aspirations, thus

31 This thread on the TES website references past set texts.

demonstrating the intricate relationship between personal philosophies, expectations and teacher agency.

## ***7.4 Approaches, pedagogy and purpose***

### **7.4.1 Approaches**

Given the level of intense and consistent influences on the teaching of Shakespeare through the socio-political contexts described above, and given how the literature repeatedly describes teachers as constrained (for example, Moore, 1999; Thomson, 2010) one might expect a relatively simple link between education policy and practice, and that the teaching of Shakespeare would share mostly similar characteristics. Yet although within my data there were many similarities, and although all the teachers in my sample did describe many shared constraints, there was considerable variation in actual *teaching*, in terms of approaches, pedagogies and purpose.

#### ***A repertoire?***

The literature and my data both suggest that teachers employ a range of teaching approaches in the Shakespeare classroom, although dig beneath the surface and there appear to be significant differences in actual practice. What emerged during data analysis was the (in)frequency of unprompted references to particular approaches. I had carefully avoided referencing specific approaches in my interview schedule in order to avoid skewing the data. Inclusion or omission was therefore, in theory, an indication of the presence or absence of personal awareness and choice. Yet, as referenced in chapter three, answers may also have reflected what is referred to as the ‘social desirability problem’ (Gray, 2009:104), whereby interviewees give answers they think will be helpful, expected, and/or which will present them as they would like to appear. This problem is one that



needed to be considered throughout data analysis but was particularly important here. Teachers volunteering to participate in research associated with the RSC may be far more sympathetic to, if not positively attracted to, active and rehearsal-based approaches, or wish to appear so. Given the inherent difficulties therefore of relying solely on what those in my sample told me about their practice, their observations about others were also considered since they offered further insights.

Much of the literature had suggested the dominance of literary criticism approaches, from Wade and Sheppard's 1994 survey of teaching approaches, through to more recent literature (for example, Davison, 2009; Boustead, 2013). What was surprising within my data, however, was that there were relatively few detailed and specific descriptions of these approaches. Ayesha's reference to close reading was a rare example. Others in my sample, if referring to literary criticism at all, described it as a contrast to their core practice. For example, Fiona alluded to literary criticism approaches when she talked about the past: 'previously it would be a case of "this word means this ... this word means this"'. This was echoed by Caro, who contrasted her heavily active and rehearsal-based approach with a dismissive reference to literary criticism: 'the alternative would be to just give them this scene and make them bash through it line by line'. Dawn gave a clear indication of preference for active and rehearsal-based approaches when she criticised literary criticism approaches that treat a Shakespeare's play as a 'literary text, like a novel... and that's not what it is'. Yet Caro, Gina and Dawn's comments suggested they were responding to poor or ineffective practice, rather than literary criticism *per se*, echoing concerns voiced by Olive (2015) and Winston (2015). By contrast, and although necessarily interpretive, Ayesha's interview suggested teaching embracing, if not predominantly based on, literary criticism approaches. There were enough references to the quality of student engagement and discussions to suggest this was successful.



Within my data there were few references to the teaching of context. The literature had painted a divided picture with some, such as Olive (2015), suggesting teachers had relatively easily adopted its inclusion into their teaching, whilst others (Yandell, 2008) bemoaned its absence. My findings appear to support Yandell's. By contrast, there were extensive references to the use of film, echoing the literature (Pennacchia, 2013). What was noteworthy were the numerous examples of multiple productions being used. Coursen (1997) had voiced concerns that media approaches can promote passivity and recommended the use of more than one production. Teachers in my sample appeared to be doing that; Sean's description of students' watching two productions followed by a discussion about 'what makes this one a better production than that one', was but one example. However, academic discourse about the nature of some films seemed *not* to have influenced practice. Mary was critical of *The Animated Tales* because 'there's not enough language in them', and along with Fiona and Gina expressed a preference for live theatre or filmed versions. Yet not one teacher in my sample expressed a concern about the content or tone of certain films, particularly *The Animated Tales*, problematised in the literature by the likes of Pennacchia (2013). This is one of many examples of the well-documented disconnect between academic research and teaching practice, discussed later.

There were two particular approaches where the literature and my data differed. The first relates to Ayesha's positive experience of reading round the class, in stark contrast to the literature, which had described the practice in terms of 'embarrassment, humiliation, and boredom' (Reynolds, 1991:5). The second relates to the surprising frequency of references to art and design type approaches, which were absent from the literature, but referenced by five teachers in my sample. Gina in particular made a number of references to using 'images', 'creative stuff', 'art'. In doing so, Gina was clearly recreating what she

considered the only successful part of her own student experiences of Shakespeare.

References to active and rehearsal-based approaches echoed much of the literature. Many studies documented the challenges of time, space and student responses posed by these methods (for example, Irish, 2011). Mary's frustrations about 'the constraints of the teaching arena – it's the classroom' mirrored claims made by Monk *et al.* (2011). Her experience of student resistance because 'they don't want to look silly in front of people' was echoed by Dawn, and reflects similar assertions by the likes of O'Brien *et al.* (2006). What was noteworthy was that lack of confidence and skills was not referenced when teachers talked about any other approaches. Both Brishti and Gina consistently reflected on confidence as an issue when considering active and rehearsal-based approaches, as witnessed in Brishti's reference to 'most teachers' (by which she clearly meant English teachers) 'would like to use drama but ... we don't have the right skills to do this and that's the kind of barrier'. Sean supported this view with his observation of 'a lot of well-meaning English teachers who have a go at drama that I don't think do it that well'. Even Caro, with her MA in Creative Arts, and determination to 'workshop' Shakespeare, expressed concerns about 'finding active approaches into a play that I don't know particularly well' citing her understanding of drama techniques as 'weak'. Teachers' lack of confidence with these approaches has been extensively covered in the literature (Neelands & O'Hanlon, 2011; Irish, 2011;) with some observing that 'These methods require sophisticated teaching skills and high levels of confidence from teachers in addition to high levels of subject knowledge' (Neelands *et al.*, 2009:12).

### ***A hierarchy?***

When analysing findings relating to teaching approaches across the key stages, there were clear examples of teachers consciously or sub-consciously adopting a

hierarchy of approaches as supported by some in the literature (for example, DCSF, 2008). This was particularly evident in Ayesha, Brishti and Dawn's explicit references to how they, or their schools, changed what appeared to be preferred teaching approaches as students made their way through secondary school. Generally, the use of art and active and rehearsal-based approaches appeared to recede. Only Mary and Fiona suggested consistent levels of inclusion across all three stages, as indicated by Mary's sense of incredulity that students continue 'acting things out, it couldn't not be'. Fiona clearly came to reject the notion of hierarchy, with the expression of her belief that 'traditional' approaches do not work for students 'when they get to A-Level and beyond. Because we're not teaching students to think for themselves'. This sense of hierarchy is clearly exacerbated, in both the literature and the data, by widely-held suspicion of the educational value of certain approaches or pedagogies (as referenced in Winston, 2015, for example). The likes of McLuskie, whose belief that 'One can dance or one can think' (2009:125) is an extreme example of how the Cartesian concept of mind/body split has influenced education policy and practice, and attitudes to Shakespeare approaches in particular. This sense of suspicion around drama and play was echoed by both Fiona and Caro, who reflected on their views prior to engagement in CPDL, as indicated by Caro's reference to being 'suspicious' about active and rehearsal-based approaches but how training 'changed my attitude'.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these experiences echo RSC analysis of teacher action research projects as part of the LPN. Irish recorded that teachers 'confess their initial scepticism, reluctance, even fear of trying out new approaches in their teaching', and cited a teacher who suggested that some English teachers prefer the 'safety, predictability and control provided by close textual analysis' to the 'uncertainty, lack of control and potential chaos provided by drama'. However, this teacher concluded that

It is precisely ... [through] the strength of drama ... and loosening our hold on a particular interpretation that we permit our students to reach their own understandings of Shakespeare; to become truly independent learners (2008b:6).

### **7.4.2 Pedagogy and (in)effective teaching**

There were clear indications in the literature that pedagogy is problematic within England's education system. The authors of a recent comprehensive review of teaching concluded that 'understanding of what constitutes effective pedagogy ... may not be ...widely shared, and even where it is ... it may not actually be right' (Coe *et al.*:2014:8). The very term 'pedagogy' appears to be part of the problem. Certainly it was a word that was rarely volunteered within my data, though whether because it was poorly understood (Alexander, 2008) or considered pretentious (Hayes, 2017) was unclear. The one specific question that I asked about pedagogy was in the second interview. Ayesha and Mary only took part in the first round of interviews, so it was perhaps unsurprising that the term was absent from Ayesha's responses and lacked depth and clarity in Mary's volunteered use of the word, with her reference to 'I know the basic pedagogy... I know what they've got to get done'. Yet knowing 'what they've got to get done' does not of itself relate to the education theory underpinning the how and why of teaching.

Equally, Gina's reference to 'pedagogic policies' such as meeting students in the corridor or having an activity as soon as students entered the classroom seemed to relate more to administration than education theory relating to actual teaching. Although Gina conveyed understanding of different pedagogical approaches, through frequent references to 'the pedagogy that I was trying to put in effect' contrasting with the pedagogy of other teachers, she rarely articulated the detail of this beyond describing herself as a 'facilitator' or sometimes ending

up 'being the opposite'. Elsewhere, there was a lack of depth and clarity with, for example, Brishti's references to pedagogy in terms of 'bits' and 'little nuggets'. All of these examples would appear to support findings in the literature. For example, Bangs *et al.*, who interviewed nearly forty key education-focused academics, politicians and policy-makers, concluded that

there is no central forum for debate on pedagogy ... managed and owned by teachers from which teachers can improve their practice ... there is still no pedagogical bank to which teachers can contribute and from which they can draw (2011:65).

Caro, Hugh, Sean, Fiona and Dawn all emerged as more assured in their references, though these were still less frequent and detailed than descriptions of approaches and purpose. Sean's volunteered reference to being a constructivist, his familiarity with notions of progressive and transmissive pedagogies and his claim that 'you can come up with a stronger hybrid ... by using both judiciously at different times' were the strongest examples of knowledge and confidence around pedagogy. Caro's description of pedagogy as 'frequently ill-informed, and poorly researched' also suggested an engagement with pedagogy as theory. Hugh's references to reflecting on his questioning skills, and Fiona's report of her experiences of RSC training and seeing the 'framing of strategies' and 'how you can model the questioning' were other examples of reflecting on and articulating the theory underpinning practice. Indeed, what was interesting was a comparison of Fiona and Gina's responses to activities that did not work in the classroom. As already indicated, Fiona's description of attempting to use RSC approaches in her early career included recognition of what went wrong: 'now I can see that I didn't frame it particularly well'. By contrast, Gina's report of her difficulties trying to teach her A-level students was characterised in terms of 'something just didn't work along the way or the way I was doing it'. This clearly

bothered Gina, yet her interview suggested she lacked both the time for reflection and the language to unpick and articulate what went wrong, echoing the claim of Bangs *et al.* referenced above.

Gina's experience of barriers in trying to incorporate alternative pedagogies further echoed the literature, suggesting two possible explanations. Firstly, Muijs and Reynolds made the interesting observation that students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as Gina's appear to be 'more in need of explicit teaching' (2011:50) through direct instruction pedagogies, suggesting a link between pedagogy and demographic. Secondly, lack of familiarity with alternative pedagogies emerged as a clear problem in the literature (Niemi, 2002; O'Grady *et al.*, 2014). Those studies highlighted the complexities of using pedagogies that differ from students' prior experiences. As already indicated, Gina made a number of despairing references to her A-Level students who were antipathetic to her chosen pedagogy. Mary's experience also closely echoed the literature on active learning, particularly around the role of senior leaders in undermining attempts to use alternatives to traditional pedagogies and approaches and the further obstacles of lack of professional support (for example, Ginsburg *et al.*, 2012).

My findings also corroborated the literature in terms of the disconnect between academic, and sometimes political, debate about pedagogy and practice. The literature indicated persistently fierce debates about traditional versus alternative pedagogies, some of which specifically referenced the Shakespeare classroom (for example, McLuskie, 2009). Whilst Dawn reported an awareness of these arguments 'on Twitter', the perception amongst my sample was that these debates did not really influence the daily experience of teaching or the Shakespeare classroom. On the whole, those in my sample did not label themselves or their teaching in terms of pedagogy or the underlying theory. The exceptions were Gina, who as already indicated was attempting to introduce

alternative pedagogies into her teaching, and Sean who volunteered a comment about being a constructivist. The data mostly suggested that pragmatism underpinned choice of pedagogy and approaches rather than ideology, echoing Moore *et al.*'s study where teachers 'preferred to describe themselves as pragmatic and eclectic rather than (say) traditional or progressive' (2002:560). This was reflected in Brishti's assertion that, for her, pedagogy was driven by the needs of the students 'in front of me', rather than ideology. Furthermore, Sean was emphatic that the notion of polarity between traditional and alternative pedagogies was a 'false premise', and Dawn commented that you would see both pedagogies in her classroom 'because there's a place for both of them'. In doing so they echoed more inclusive perspectives within the literature. For example, some have argued that traditional and progressive pedagogies complement rehearsal-based approaches to Shakespeare, given their inclusion of practical *and* intellectual rigour (for example Stredder, 2004; Bate, interviewed in Winston, 2015).

There was little indication within the data of awareness and informed choice around teacher- or student-led pedagogies. Fiona was the only teacher in my sample to make an explicit reference when she described her teaching as more 'student-centred' than it had been in the past. Elsewhere, there were indications of teacher- or student-led pedagogies, but it was unclear whether these were conscious, informed choices or not. Brishti's descriptions appeared to suggest an underlying teacher-led pedagogy. For example, her reference to 'modelling' ideas within *The Tempest* 'because it's to do with colonialism', suggested a top-down, teacher-led interpretation. Brishti provided a similar example when she reported shaping interpretations of *Macbeth* around Haitian notions of voodoo. By contrast, Ayesha described letting her 'class take ownership', giving them a 'sense of autonomy or agency'. Caro offered an example of teacher-led pedagogy, though interestingly she clearly wanted to convey to students a greater sense of



ownership, as evidenced in her statement: ‘they chose scenes; I’d already chosen them but I let them think that they were choosing them’.

The literature repeatedly suggested that ‘the synthesis, communication and implementation of [pedagogic] knowledge are far weaker than they should be’ (James & Pollard, 2011:276). Thus a key consideration with the above examples was the extent to which Brishti, Ayesha and Caro were *aware* of their adoption of student or teacher-led pedagogies, and whether their practice was underpinned by pedagogic knowledge. These considerations emerged during data analysis and were not therefore investigated during interviews. Yet the weaknesses James and Pollard identified may explain further concerns raised in the literature that *teaching* approaches in the Shakespeare classroom, even those apparently engaging, might lack sufficient focus on *learning*. Wright’s observations about ‘lively activities’ in the Shakespeare classroom masking absence of learning (2005) was echoed by Winston (2015). There were possible indications of this within the data. Gina’s description of using art approaches which would be ‘hopefully noisy, hopefully messy’, and Hugh’s aim for a ‘busy atmosphere’ seemed to echo Caro’s reflection that teachers can be too ‘task focused’ rather than thinking about ‘what are the kids going to learn today?’ This would appear to be a concern that is particularly relevant to the Shakespeare classroom. Harris claimed that ‘Battling with challenging texts, and reluctant or even obstructive pupils, such teachers are inevitably forced to condense, “cut corners” or seek the most appealing lesson plans’ (2003:41).

Faced with the battleground that clearly characterises some teachers’ experiences of Shakespeare, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a preoccupation with ‘appealing lesson plans’ and ‘lively activities’ rather than pedagogy. However, it is worth returning to Biesta, who problematised the very notion of effective teaching (2010), arguing that it needs to be considered within the context of stated purpose. This is particularly relevant to the Shakespeare



classroom since multiple purposes seem to be at play, not all of them concerned with academic achievement.

### **7.4.3 Multiple purposes in the Shakespeare classroom**

Reflecting on schools in general, Thomson indicated that they ‘find themselves juggling multiple purposes [which] may be in tension or contradictory’ (2010:16); the same would appear to be true of the teaching of Shakespeare. As reported in the literature, many studies argued that Shakespeare has long been used to serve various agendas, not only educational but also political (Eagleton, 2009; Sinfield, 1994). Within the data there were clear indications of support for the teaching of Shakespeare within the context of cultural heritage. Ayesha, Brishti and Sean were particularly keen to stress this, with Sean referring to a wider ‘cultural entitlement’, and Brishti and Ayesha emphatic that students from non-British backgrounds access England’s cultural heritage. Yet interestingly both Brishti and Sean were the most cautious around notions of a literary canon, as indicated by Sean’s suspicion about ‘the way government selects its heritage and ... its literary canon’, and Brishti’s comment ‘I know it’s a question of who defines the canon’.

Sean was the only one to reference British values, though he was fairly dismissive of ‘these absurd notions’. Whilst there was therefore an indication of teachers supporting, or at least working within, wider educational purposes, a surprising finding was the extent to which teachers added their own. Brishti, Hugh, Ayesha and Dawn appeared strongly motivated to teach Shakespeare from the perspective of continued relevance, with Dawn going as far as to suggest it was the ‘thing that influences me the most’. What was particularly interesting was the amount of time and energy spent on the purpose of trying to make Shakespeare less intimidating, with Ayesha trying to ‘ease’ students in, and Gina declaring a main priority being to ‘start slowly’. Students’ fear of Shakespeare’s

language is well-documented in the literature (Gregory, 2003; Harris, 2003) but its impact on teaching is often over-looked. Yet my findings suggest it is a key – and time-consuming – influence.

There were further interesting variations relating to purpose. Whilst some within the literature emphasised exploration of interpretation and possibilities *within* Shakespeare's plays (Gibson, 1994; Doran, 2013) Sean linked the teaching of Shakespeare with *external* purposes, stressing the school's wider commitment to 'showing children possibilities'. This was a clear indication of the relationship between Sean and his school's beliefs about the purpose of education, and its influence on how he approached Shakespeare. Similarly, Dawn's aim to teach Shakespeare 'differently' said as much about a broader purpose in mitigating what she perceived as the negative influences of contemporary education, as it did about her commitment to active and rehearsal-based approaches. This was suggested in her description of students, who 'trail' into a classroom, 'sit down in your designated seat' and the 'relief' of going to a lesson where it is different. Finally, personal purpose was perhaps most stark in Fiona's responses. Fiona repeatedly talked about her passion for live theatre, as indicated in her statement that: 'I think what's at the heart of my interest in teaching Shakespeare is that I love the theatre'.

## **7.5 *Student responses***

Student responses to classroom Shakespeare, as distinct from pre-existing attitudes, clearly impact on teachers' experiences. A consistent finding was around teachers' experiences of students' struggling with Shakespeare's language. For example, Caro's perception that the biggest barrier is 'the language, absolutely, it's the language, they just don't understand' chimed both with the rest of the data and the literature (Yandell, 1997; Gregory, 2003). Yet

Caro and Dawn both explicitly described student responses to the language changing as a result of active or rehearsal-based methods. Caro's description of students being more willing 'to struggle with the language' if they had engaged in what Caro labelled a workshop approach was echoed by Dawn who described using rehearsal-based methods, resulting in students 'grappling with the language'. This reflects studies in the wider literature. For example, Winston cited research suggesting that 'when presented within the spirit of play, children can tolerate, indeed enjoy, ambiguous or unusual language' (2013:5), echoing Gibson's claim, referenced in chapter one, that the difficulties around Shakespeare's language are 'enabling ones' and 'Enjoyment increases with the sense of difficulties overcome' (1993:85).

Yet there are important exceptions, for example Coles' observation of students who 'emphatically declared that they had no desire to study another Shakespeare play' despite their teacher's use of 'active methods' (2009:47). Within the data, Dawn and Caro both cited experiences of an individual student disliking active and rehearsal-based approaches, and Gina described a whole sixth form group hating these approaches. Yet these responses were atypical in the data, whilst the literature suggests a strong relationship between active and rehearsal-based approaches and positive student response (Gibson, 1998; Stredder, 2004; Banks, 2014). In addition, both literature and data provided examples of teachers experiencing positive student responses to Shakespeare, regardless of approach, and despite pre-existing negative attitudes and struggles with the language. Ayesha's report of students having 'so much fun, they've been really excited'; Sean's 'bold claim' that all students left his school feeling positive about Shakespeare; Dawn's description of students knowing that the experience of Shakespeare is 'something special', and Fiona's sense of student 'excitement' around Shakespeare were all indications of positive engagement which is equally well-documented in the literature (Winston, 2015; RSC, 2016; Cassidy, 2016).

One further finding around student responses is worth noting. Both Irish (2008b) and Winston (2015) reported students, as well as teachers, being suspicious and sceptical about the value of approaches that involve drama and play. Wider findings about active learning (for example, Drew & Mackie, 2011) suggest scepticism is a particularly typical response from older students or those deemed higher ability. Ayesha, Fiona and Gina's experiences echo these findings, with, for example, Ayesha's reference to her sixth form students' sense that drama 'isn't real learning', Fiona's description of students labelled high ability as the 'hardest to convert', and Gina's experience of successfully using active and rehearsal-based approaches with year 8 students, but being met with resistance from her A-Level group. Collectively then, the literature and the data intimate that challenging responses to particular approaches are particularly associated with students who are older or successful within the existing structures and practices of schools. This echoed Hammersley's claim that student response to different pedagogies depends on a range of factors, including student attitude (2005).

## ***7.6 Training, research and evidence***

### **7.6.1 ITE and CPDL**

Several studies raised concerns around variability of focus on subject knowledge within ITE (Carter, 2015) yet little addressed the specific early training needs of teachers of Shakespeare. The data suggested little in the way of systematic training in Shakespeare-specific subject knowledge, approaches or pedagogies; at best teachers reported receiving one or two days of training, but the focus appeared to be on learning a few techniques or activities, such as Ayesha's reference to 'suggestions of drama activities'. Gina's experience of absence, of not having any real training in terms of 'how to embed it [Shakespeare] effectively within a lesson' appeared to reflect most experiences.

When it comes to Shakespeare-specific CPDL, my findings reflect wider criticisms about teachers' 'variable' access to CPDL (Brooks, 2012:35). Four out of the nine teachers in my sample made no reference to Shakespeare-specific CPDL at all. With those who did, the literature offers considerable insights to help assess likely effectiveness and influence of these experiences, with effectiveness measured in terms of benefits to students. The extensive research into CPDL conducted by Cordingley (for example, 2004; 2012 with Bell; and as part of the Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group, 2016) highlights the importance of focusing on *reflection* and teacher *learning* in order to extend CPD into CPDL. Cordingley described CPD interventions as similar to electricity pylons, with the *learning* being the feature which relays the training along the electricity wires back into schools (2017). Along with Bell, she reported a number of characteristics as essential. Citing extensive studies, they concluded that the most effective models are 'collaborative', involving 'staff working together'; 'supported by specialist expertise'; 'focused on aspirations for students'; 'sustained over time'; and explore 'evidence from trying new things to connect practice to theory' (2012:4).

Within my sample, those who had experienced CPDL had done so primarily through courses offered by Shakespeare's Globe or the RSC, although Sean made a reference to a training day with Rex Gibson. The extent to which these experiences had influenced practice appeared partly to relate to time and reflection, echoing the studies cited above. Brishti's narrative offered some contradictions here; she talked about leaving twilight sessions with 'at least ten ideas', and being 'completely transformed'. Yet she also suggested that time undermined the impact of these opportunities when she stated that 'I've seen some amazing things during training and I wish I could adapt, I had time to put that into my planning'.

By contrast, Dawn and Fiona's experiences of the LPN (over three years), and Caro's of doing an MA (over two years), appeared to support Cordingley and Bell's analysis (*op. cit.*). Fiona's suggestion that she looked at the theories around the teaching of Shakespeare far more than she had done previously was an indication of how training not only changed practice, but changed knowledge and awareness of educational theory, which Caro's experience mirrored. The focus on 'aspirations for students' also appeared to be present within experiences of the LPN. Revisiting the work of Rancière, Franks *et al.* observed the following about the LPN, and 'something in the RSC's expectation that the students would understand that is reminiscent of Rancière's notion about overcoming the gap of ignorance between students and teachers' (2014:179).

Certainly Fiona's experience suggested she changed her expectations of students following engagement in the LPN and is yet another example of how CPDL can challenge teachers' pre-existing beliefs and expectations. What was also interesting to observe was the different experiences of CPDL done collaboratively versus individually. Fiona and Dawn's experiences suggest they were far more positive because of the extent of collaboration with colleagues. By contrast, Caro's experience appeared more isolating, marking her out as different from other English teachers, an experience revisited below.

### **7.6.2 Research, evidence and engagement in academic discourse**

The literature portrayed a fairly consistent picture of lack of teacher awareness of and engagement in academic discourse, research and evidence (Hargreaves, 1996; BERA/RSA, 2014). Yet the data presented a more varied picture. Within my sample, Hugh was the only one who referenced the EEF Teacher Toolkit, and not one teacher appeared aware of initiatives such as ResearchEd. Where references to research, evidence and theory did occur they were mostly amongst

those who had completed a Masters or some other form of intense CPDL, corroborating Brown's view that accessing research and evidence is a postgraduate activity (2013). Ayesha gave the impression of a vibrant community of postgraduate students through her description of a group 'all still at the IoE as Masters students, and still writing things together and talking about teaching practice, and we're still talking to tutors and people that we've met at these conferences about our practice'. Similarly Dawn mentioned accessing evidence via the LPN, and engaging in an online community of fellow teachers. Caro gave considered responses around her attempts to keep up-to-date with new research findings, and Fiona referenced looking 'at theories over teaching far more than I would have done' as a result of the LPN.

Yet what was noteworthy was that Sean was one of the teachers who was most articulate in terms of his awareness and use of the language and theories associated with education, despite not having undertaken postgraduate study. His self-characterisation as a constructivist, for example, was atypical, as was his reference to publishing 'a few things' on performance management. Overall, however, my sample was varied in terms of engagement in research and debate, slightly, though not entirely, at odds with Oancea's observation that 'the apparent silence of teachers, as powerful participants in constructing the publicly visible accounts of their professional knowledge, its nature and importance, and the best ways to cultivate it, is palpable' (2014:497).

## **7.7 The personal**

### **7.7.1 The influence of life histories**

As referenced in chapter two, some studies suggested the 'profound' influence on English teachers of their own student experiences of school (Ball, 1985:81), and the 'vivid character' of one's own English teacher (Goodwyn, 2002:73). Certainly



Hugh's experience appeared to verify both these claims, with his references to how he would 'mirror almost' the approaches of his former English teacher, whilst both Brishti and Sean described two influential English teachers who later became friends. Gina made a number of references to using art-based approaches in her teaching, appearing consciously or subconsciously to replicate her own experiences, which she 'vividly' remembered and contrasted with all other teaching which she described as 'dry'. Fiona's experience of being taken to the theatre had clearly been profound, underpinning much of her purpose in teaching Shakespeare, as already indicated. All these experiences reflect wider findings that suggest

the personal experience of being a pupil, whether positive or negative, seemed to be influential in the ways in which the participants in this study viewed themselves as teachers. It is interesting to note that former teachers (and their teaching) were seen as a 'frame of reference' (Flores & Day, 2006:224).

Negative experiences are thus equally influential, as evidenced by Gina's experience of rejecting the 'dry' way she had been taught because Shakespeare 'was the element of my literature courses that I least enjoyed, and I was aware that I didn't want to do that to the kids that I taught'.

What is almost completely absent from the literature are studies that consider family-based childhood experiences of Shakespeare (Olive, 2012b), yet my data indicated strong influences. Ayesha and Mary's teaching practices could be traced back to positive experiences of encountering Shakespeare's stories in the home. The absence of negative experiences and in particular fear of Shakespeare was clearly stated by Ayesha. Indeed, she made the interesting link between teacher and student anxiety when she talked about not experiencing 'the anxiety that teachers may pass on to their students about doing Shakespeare'. It is speculative, but this may have influenced Ayesha's confidence in tackling *Othello*



with her year 10 students, given it was not typical school practice. Perhaps Ayesha *expected* her students to approach it without fear and anxiety, because that had been her own personal experience.

Yet positive family or school experiences were clearly not a pre-requisite for later teaching. Sean came across as something of an outlier, a 'type' not typically represented in the literature. His childhood experiences indicate how complex and unpredictable life histories can be. Brought up in a working class home devoid of books and opportunities for theatre-going, taught Shakespeare 'badly' at school, Sean still managed independent theatre-going aged 15, as indicated by his reference to taking himself off to see *Julius Caesar*, an experience he clearly loved. Throughout Sean's two interviews he made several references to his personal connection to London, to its history and politics. Collectively, Shakespeare and London appear to have brought together several boyhood interests that perhaps helped Sean overcome lack of positive experiences in the home and at school. As such, it is perhaps another example of 'Shakespeare's cross-cultural appeal' (Bate, 1997:318).

Equally, Sean's experience highlights the importance of personal rather than school location. Indeed, amongst many elements of life histories which appear to influence the experience of teaching Shakespeare, location appeared to play a particularly key role. Yet location is only briefly referenced in terms of teachers' life histories as a whole, and is concentrated on London (Marshall, 2000a; Yandell, 2014). The data suggest that location is an important characteristic, and that London was deeply influential on five of the nine teachers in my sample, suggesting a different type of 'London effect'. Sean's experience of independent theatre-going in London echoed Caro's, who suggested that her teaching approaches might have been influenced by seeing 'so much Shakespeare'. Similarly, Brishti's life history included several trips to Shakespeare's Globe.

Ayesha volunteered references to the influence of doing her PGCE and MA at London's IoE. She also referred to LATE, as did Mary, Caro, and Brishti.

One further noteworthy aspect of life histories which emerged at data analysis stage is around experiences of change. Returning to the literature, some studies concentrate on whole school change, observing the importance of 'external support' networks, professional development, and the role of senior staff (Thomson, 2010:51). Others focus on 'teacher change' (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), of particularly relevance here. Citing the wider literature they highlight the importance of what is referred to as a 'personal growth approach', whereby teachers seek 'greater fulfilment' as practitioners; the importance of 'ongoing, critical reflection', 'teachers as learners' and 'schools as learning communities' (*ibid.*:948-949). Within my sample, Fiona and Dawn's experiences most closely matched these studies. Their multiple references to the LPN included references to whole school change through external support, CPDL and the role of school leaders, along with all the characteristics of the personal growth approach. Yet Thomson also highlighted the contextual nature of whole school change, and referenced difficulties faced by schools in 'challenging contexts' (*ibid.*:67). Dawn's experience reflected this, since hers was of whole school change *to a degree*, given the commitment to changing practice, but only at KS3. Brishti, Ayesha and Caro's experiences mirrored some of the characteristics of the personal growth model, through their commitment to seeking out personal opportunities for professional development. However, the extent to which they engaged in ongoing critical reflection outside the specifics of a Masters or individual professional development days was less clear.

What was interesting was Ayesha and Mary's experiences of change through moving to different schools. Whilst there are studies into the impact on students of such experiences, this appears to be an under-documented area when it comes to teachers. It does not fit most models of change examined by the authors cited

above, yet the experiences appeared to prompt a degree of reflection which, as discussed, is a critical part of the learning element of CPDL. Both Mary and Ayesha provided reflective accounts of different school cultures and the impact on practice. For example, Mary made multiple references to the influence of school cultures and access to space, whilst Ayesha was able to articulate different interpretations of Shakespeare dictated not only by a department head but an entire school ethos, and contrast it with a more collegiate approach. Whilst these reflections were not necessarily conscious, these teachers' experiences of change altered their perceptions of what makes for (in)effective learning environments.

### **7.7.2 The emotional experience of teaching Shakespeare**

Day and Leitch suggested an increasing awareness of emotion as 'central' to teaching (2001:407), echoing the work of Hargreaves (for example, 2001). The data not only confirmed these findings but seemed to suggest English teachers experience a particularly complex relationship between Shakespeare and emotions, not least because feelings appear so extreme. All nine teachers appeared to have strong emotional connections to teaching Shakespeare. Interestingly, however, Hugh's appeared more bound up with *teaching* itself than Shakespeare specifically, as suggested through his statements about loving the 'pressure', and 'the success', and his reference to 'excitement' around 'building that relationship' with students. At the other extreme was Ayesha's reference to a lifelong 'love affair' with Shakespeare. Sean appeared to have equally profound emotional connections with Shakespeare, interwoven with feelings and experiences of London and politics that dated back to childhood. His statement that 'there are lines in Shakespeare's plays that will haunt me until I die' was a clear indication of the depth of his feelings.

Brishti's declared love for *Othello* and *The Tempest* was a clear expression of the link between emotion and sense of identity. Hers was an experience characterised by harmony between emotion, identity and teaching practice. Gina's experience appeared to be the opposite. Her self-declared 'romanticism' for English literature and her repeated references to love of English, and reading, was starkly contrasted with the emotions associated with actual teaching. Her experiences of teaching in a school which marginalised literature, was highlighted through her statement that 'I don't really enjoy teaching [English Language]... I think it kills my subject that I love because it's not literature really'. Gina's experience echoed a finding elsewhere that 'Emotion may alter a teacher's identity in relation to the profession, but may also be altered by aspects of the profession' (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009:180).

What was noteworthy was the way in which love and hate characterised these teachers' experiences of others around them. Ayesha's reference to working with teachers who feel 'passionately about Shakespeare' echoed Caro's experience of working with a drama teacher who 'loves Shakespeare' but was a clear contrast with other drama and English colleagues, some of whom she referenced as hating Shakespeare. There are limited references within the literature to English teachers' experiences of colleagues hating Shakespeare; Yandell (1997) provided a rare example. By contrast, extremes of emotions in terms of student attitudes and responses are well-documented, with some studies suggesting profound hatred of Shakespeare (Coles, 2013b) and others joy and excitement (as reported in Winston, 2015; RSC, 2016). Elsewhere I have suggested that Shakespeare is 'the Marmite of English literature' (Evans, 2015), loved or loathed with equal passion. Within the data, Shakespeare was described as the most hated aspect of the English curriculum by Caro, whilst Ayesha referenced student fear of Shakespeare and Fiona reported her previous experiences of 'trying to overcome the groan' when Shakespeare's name was mentioned. At the other extreme Mary,

for example, made a number of references to students' love of Shakespeare, Caro talked about her students 'absolutely loving' workshop activities, and Sean was adamant that students left his school with positive experiences.

### **7.7.3 The influence of personal identity**

#### ***Ethnicity***

Brishti and Ayesha's experiences were perhaps the strongest indication of the potentially profound influence of personal identity on the teaching of Shakespeare. Perhaps that is no coincidence, given their reflections on being BAME teachers, yet their experiences were another example of extreme variation. Brishti had a clear fascination with *The Tempest* 'and the idea of colonialism', because for her it offered a positive resonance with her own ethnic background. By contrast, Ayesha's experience was of racism. As such, it provided another example of the intricate and influential web of a range of socio-political, professional and personal contexts. In Ayesha's case, the status of Shakespeare within British society was used by her colleagues to mark her out as 'other', resulting in Ayesha perception that she was considered 'not worthy to teach Shakespeare' because of her ethnicity. It was also further evidence of the profound influence of colleagues.

Research into racism in the context of teachers rather than students suggests that Ayesha's experience is not atypical. Some studies indicate that BAME teachers have to deal with stereotypical perceptions due to their ethnicity from staff and students alike (Lander & Zaheerli, 2016). They go on to describe how 'There have also been suggestions that the construction of whiteness as the "norm" imposes on BAME teachers an intrinsic disadvantage' (*ibid.*:37), which again echoes Ayesha's experience of being treated as 'other'. As discussed in chapter two, there is very little about ethnicity and the teaching of Shakespeare,

with the exception of an article by Choudhury, who described her perception that white English teachers can approach Shakespeare as 'neutral', whilst 'others' are defined before they even start to teach (2007:198), which again appears to reflect Ayesha's experience.

### ***Knowledge, confidence and skills***

Personal knowledge, confidence and skills emerged as of critical importance to the experience of teaching Shakespeare in both literature and data. Many studies suggested general concerns around teacher subject knowledge (for example, Carter, 2015), and specific concerns about Shakespeare (Blake & Shortis, 2010). Citing wider studies Green and McIntyre argued that 'Research suggests that academic experience of a subject is, in itself, inadequate preparation for understanding the complexities of teaching that subject'. Specifically focusing on Shakespeare, they proposed a vast difference between degree, and 'practical classroom knowledge' of Shakespeare (2011:16). Subject and 'practical classroom' knowledge of Shakespeare was an area of considerable variation within my sample. Sean appeared to have studied the majority of Shakespeare's plays at university, no doubt influencing his willingness to teach a wide repertoire. By contrast, some in my sample expressed personal doubts about the depth of their knowledge, or relied heavily on plays with which they were already familiar, as indicated by Brishti's report of sticking to a core set of plays. Gina's description of doing only one unit on Shakespeare at university and her reported lack confidence in the early part of her career may well be attributed to lack of subject knowledge. Comments made by Sean and Fiona, expressing concerns about the lack of subject knowledge in those they managed or attempted to recruit, appeared to further verify claims in the literature.

Knowledge, confidence and skills appeared most varied around approaches to teaching Shakespeare, with both literature and data highlighting concerns

around active and rehearsal-based approaches in particular. Dawn suggested that most English teachers lacked the knowledge of these approaches, which she described as ‘radically different’. The literature indicated that, even if aware of them, English teachers lack confidence and skills around using them (Neelands *et al.*, 2009; Thomson *et al.*, 2010). Quigley (himself an English teacher) asserted that

Many teachers are most confident teaching reading and writing, rather than drama or speaking and listening. Teachers must develop a drama repertoire that gives them confidence to employ such strategies in the classroom (2014:10).

Yet Sean and Hugh appeared consistently confident in their use of active and rehearsal-based approaches, as indicated by Hugh’s description of ‘having the confidence’ to try things out and Sean’s description of himself as ‘a great storyteller’. Similarly, Fiona and Dawn had clearly acquired deep-rooted confidence through CPDL. By contrast, Caro’s description of a lack of confidence ‘about finding active approaches into a play that I don’t know particularly well’ reinforces the strong link between knowledge, confidence and skills. Along with Brishti and Gina, Caro’s lack of confidence appeared to stem from concerns about ‘not [being] a drama teacher, and ... that’s where ... my understanding of drama techniques ... is weak’. Brishti and Gina made similar comments, but this was particularly surprising coming from Caro, given the content of her MA, and the input from Shakespeare’s Globe.

Caro’s experience might be linked to another finding emerging from the data, supported by the literature, which suggests links to gender. Some research has reported women entering the profession with lower levels of confidence in their teaching abilities than men (Kalaian & Freeman, 1994). Others have indicated a link between ‘feminine’ teacher behaviours and lack of self-confidence and self-



depreciation (Francis, 2008), whilst a further study suggested female teachers report higher levels of stress than their male peers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Certainly there was a striking contrast between how Hugh and Sean articulated their experiences, compared with the seven female teachers. Hugh and Sean spoke with a confident tone throughout their interviews whilst, as already indicated, Sean in particular was more than happy to indicate examples of his success. By contrast, Brishti and Ayesha frequently used words that qualified their statements, making them appear more hesitant and less confident, as evidenced in Ayesha's comment 'I think they all do kind of enjoy it' and Brishti's use of the word 'quite': 'in fact they quite enjoyed the story and they probably did quite well in the piece of work '. Gina, Brishti, Fiona and Caro were willing to comment on failures and weaknesses whilst such references were absent from Sean and Hugh's narratives.

### ***Motivation to teach***

Goodwyn consistently referenced English teachers' love of reading as core to their personal identity and their motivation to teach (2002; 2010b; 2014). Certainly Hugh, Gina, Dawn, and Brishti appeared to support this claim as indicated, for example, through Brishti's statement that 'I wanted to be an English teacher because I loved books'. Yet Fiona talked more generally about motivation stemming from love of the subject, rather than books specifically. Furthermore, Hugh appeared equally driven by 'the desire ... to help young people improve', whilst Sean was emphatic that his motivation was not solely related to love of subject: 'because we don't teach subjects, we teach children'. Elsewhere, Sean's interviews suggested a strong link between Shakespeare and opening up wider possibilities, whilst his commitment to speaking and listening was as much about Shakespeare as it was helping young people prepare for the future world of work. Sean and Hugh's identities therefore seemed to support a separate study suggesting that most secondary teachers were motivated by helping young people



learn (Hobson *et al.*, 2004). What is noteworthy, however, is that two out of the nine did not reflect either study. Mary's experience of losing her daughter and being driven to teach because otherwise 'I would be letting my daughter down ...' was clearly an extreme indication of personal circumstances underpinning motivation. Ayesha's motivation was far more pragmatic with her report of entering teaching because she could not yet afford to do a PhD. Yet both experiences serve as an important reminder that motivation can be shaped by highly unique emotions and circumstances.

### ***Being different***

There was a repeated sense that these teachers were, or reported themselves as, different from their colleagues. Again, this might reflect social desirability, since some in my sample may have preferred to appear different. Yet some studies have suggested that teachers who 'are intrinsically motivated to question their practice on a fundamental level and look to outside models to improve teaching and learning' are a minority (Elmore, 1996:16). Ayesha, Brishti, Dawn, Fiona and Caro's experiences of exploring 'outside models' through sustained CPDL opportunities would suggest they might be in this category. What I was particularly interested in was how difference, or perceptions of difference, influenced the experience of teaching Shakespeare. Dawn and Fiona's experiences were within school-wide contexts, and their experiences of teaching differently from past practice, or differently from colleagues in the wider teaching profession, appeared to be positive. Indeed, their reports appeared to match descriptions of what is commonly referred to as a 'community of practice', referenced as an essential ingredient of positive whole school change (Thomson, 2010).

Other teachers indicated they were adopting teaching approaches or pedagogies that differed from their colleagues. Brishti's affirmation that, though colleagues

used active and rehearsal-based approaches, 'I don't think I've seen anybody else take them to the car-park like I have', and Hugh's confirmation that other teachers did not stand on tables as he did when recreating *The Globe* were both examples. Yet neither Hugh nor Brishti suggested that they experienced difference as a negative characteristic of teaching Shakespeare. By contrast, Caro's declaration that no other English teachers in her school 'teach the way I do', and the way in which Mary talked of having to be 'very creative with what I can use' because of school and departmental cultures suggested real or perceived differences about their teaching compared with colleagues. Mary and Caro appeared more isolated, as indeed did Gina, despite references to whole school training and strategies. Certainly Ayesha's experience of being perceived as different from her colleagues in her first school was an isolating experience. All four teachers appeared to reflect Fullan's description of 'low consensus' schools, where teachers learn 'the lesson that they must shoulder classroom burdens by themselves' (2007:38).

#### **7.7.4 Personal philosophies**

Claxton has been damning about what he perceived as the 'idiosyncratic' and 'largely unexamined set of beliefs, attitudes and values' (1984:169) present when teachers enter the profession. Certainly the data suggested that many, and perhaps all, of the teachers in my sample appeared to find a deeply personal perspective upon which they constructed their teaching, as already indicated in terms of emotional connections with teaching. Indeed, all nine teachers came across as passionate about aspects of teaching Shakespeare. For example, Fiona's passion for theatre, Brishti's for post-colonialism, and Sean's belief in education and Shakespeare as a means of opening up possibilities provided a conscious or subconscious lens through which they taught. Hattie has suggested that passion is an essential requirement for 'excellence in education' (2008:238). Thus passion would appear to be an extremely desirable teaching characteristic. Yet many

studies as well as Claxton's indicate the importance of teachers' examining their personal beliefs, values, philosophies, and indeed passions. The need for teachers to be reflective practitioners has long been established in the literature (Day, 1993; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Pollard has extensively analysed the need for teachers to be reflective, to 'know oneself' given that 'We all have strengths and weaknesses...' (2002:81). The importance of self-awareness has been emphasised by Salmon, who was explicit that 'When we teach, in a sense we teach ourselves ... we convey not just our explicit knowledge, but also our position towards it – the personal ramifications and implications which it has for us' (1995:33).

Yet within the data there were relatively few examples of teachers' reflecting on teaching, let alone the influence of their personal philosophies and passions. For example, Gina's comment towards the end of her first interview suggested that she had not previously found the time for such reflection. Hugh made a brief reference to reflection, mentioning the use of filmed lesson observations, whilst Dawn was unusual in suggesting she regularly reflected on practice. Fiona provided a rare example when she reported an example of ineffective practice which years later she was able to reflect on and articulate what had gone wrong: 'I didn't frame it particularly well'.

Thus the multiple examples of teaching Shakespeare which prioritised characteristics based on highly personal beliefs and passions appear to have occurred without reflection. Brishti clearly emphasised ideas: 'what universal idea do I want them to go away with?', rather than the language which she had struggled with as a student. This was a direct contrast with Mary and her focus on language and *reading* (as indicated through her statement about how, from an early age, she could 'read the language'). This in itself contrasted with Caro's emphasis on *listening* and *performance*, for example, her reference to students 'reading out lines to themselves and listening for the words and listening to what

was happening with the language because that's how it's supposed to be received'. Fiona's commitment to theatre shone through, as did Sean's interest in politics and Shakespeare as a means of opening up possibilities through interpretation. These indicative examples highlight the extent to which the experience of teaching Shakespeare is shaped by the personal identity and philosophies of each individual teacher. More importantly, students would be having very different experiences depending on whether their teacher prioritised ideas, language, performance or interpretations. Yet it would appear that these personal philosophies went largely unexamined, echoing Claxton's claim.

### **7.7.5 The influence of absence**

The notion of absence as an influence is all but missing from Shakespeare studies, though it is present as a concept within research methodology. For example, two studies cited the well-known dialogue from a Sherlock Holmes book about the 'curious incident of the dog in the night-time' (Gough, 2010; Oancea, 2014). Gough reflected on the significance of 'Holmes's willingness to apprehend and ascribe meaning to a silence – to perceive the absence of a trace as itself a trace' (2010:4-5). As referenced in chapter three, Sartre's interest in absence within phenomenology influenced my research. Absence is often associated with deconstruction (for example, Burman & MacLure, 2005; and Derrida, 1976) and silence, and the deconstruction of speech necessary for analysis of discourse (for example, Mazzei, 2004). Whilst of interest, my findings suggested the need to focus on *absence of experience* as an influence.

Absence featured as noteworthy at policy level, where Olive observed an absence of a consensus on *why* Shakespeare, what the value of Shakespeare is within England's education system, and what the outcomes could or should be (Olive, 2015). This absence means that teachers require their own justifications for why they teach, or have to teach, Shakespeare. Yandell's teacher, referenced in

chapter two, who declared ‘I had to, you have to’ (1997:285) as the reason for teaching Shakespeare, knew that response was unsatisfactory. Within my sample, no teacher presented such a negative rationale, but as already indicated, there were significant variations in the purpose each ascribed to why they taught Shakespeare. Absence of time featured heavily in the literature (Harris, 2003; Irish, 2011) and was verified by most teachers in my sample as having a strong impact on not only content but also approaches. The importance of time for reflection is well documented in the literature (Cordingley & Bell, 2012); the effect of its absence was particularly marked in Gina’s interviews, as referenced above.

I have already indicated experiences of absence in terms of knowledge, confidence and skills, echoing the literature (Neelands & O’Hanlon, 2011). Many studies point to absence of awareness and use of evidence to inform teaching (Hargreaves, 1996; Goldacre, 2013). Its impact on those in my sample who made no reference to research and evidence was hard to ascertain but had Gina, for example, been aware of research and evidence, particularly into the challenges of introducing alternative pedagogies, her experience may well have been very different. Indeed, the literature highlights the critical importance of ‘support for teachers to invent, use and sustain a wider range of pedagogical strategies’ (Thomson, 2010:31). Absence of such support is clearly influential, as suggested by both Gina and Mary’s experiences. Finally, absence of Shakespeare-specific ITE and CPDL opportunities emerged strongly in both the literature and the data. Gina entered the classroom having done one unit on Shakespeare at degree level, one session during ITE, and had had no further professional development support. Hugh and Ayesha’s experiences were similar. Amidst so many influences and experiences that are absent, it is perhaps unsurprising that teachers rely so heavily on characteristics and experiences that are present, in terms of their own highly individual identities, life histories and philosophies.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

The overarching aim of my research was to explore the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. My purpose was not to look at *why* we teach Shakespeare, nor to focus on debates about the *value* of Shakespeare; others have done that extensively (Belsey, 2007; Olive, 2015). Instead, my focus was necessarily constrained to the specifics of *how* the teaching of Shakespeare is experienced. This final chapter starts by presenting key findings, looking first at influences that were consistent across the literature and my data, such as assessment and the heightened pressures associated with the phenomenon of Shakespeare. Key findings also reflect significant variations, such as the influence of ITE, CPDL, research and evidence. Location, school culture and leadership are also noteworthy for their differences. Finally, the nature of personal identities, life histories and philosophies were not only inevitably unique but go a long way to explaining variations in practice. In conclusion, this chapter culminates by addressing the strengths and limitations of this particular study, alongside recommendations, and implications for further research.

### 8.1 *Key findings*

#### 8.1.1 **The teaching of Shakespeare is a microcosm of England's education system**

It is not only impossible to divorce the teaching of Shakespeare from England's wider education system, the former is a microcosm of the latter and analysis of each illuminates the other. Both provide a shared and consistent influence on the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. As referenced in chapter one, some have suggested that Shakespeare's 'place in the school curriculum' which 'includes both content and teaching methodology ... perhaps mirrors the debate

about education in general' (Gilmour, 1994:8). Later literature and my findings not only echo this, but go further, indicating strong parallels around history, purpose, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and notions of teacher effectiveness. That England's education system lacks national purpose is a clear claim within the literature (Mortimore, 2014). The same has been suggested about English as a subject (Davison and Dowson, 2009) and, within it, the teaching of Shakespeare (Olive, 2015). All have been shaped more by the vagaries of England's social, cultural and economic history (Eaglestone, 2009; Ward & Connolly, 2008; Moore, 2012) than a clearly articulated purpose and vision for England's future. As evidenced in the data, in place of consensual purpose around why we teach Shakespeare, teachers consciously or subconsciously invest their teaching with their own individual purposes.

'Debate' about education is characterised in terms of 'battles' (Alexander, 2008), 'enemies' (Gove, 2013b), or 'games'. According to Sean, politicians not only treat the subject of English as a 'political football', but individual schools are engaged in tactical manoeuvres that have less to do with achieving a broad and balanced curriculum for their students, or the specifics of 'real, English teaching' and more to do with being in 'a league table game'. The threat or reality of 'relegation' by Ofsted, was referenced by all nine teachers in my sample, and was particularly influential on Dawn and Gina. Their experiences of working in areas of significant deprivation mirrored wider findings, clearly indicating that schools serving disadvantaged communities face significant challenges over and above those experienced by all schools (Allen *et al.*, 2012; Allen *et al.*, 2016). More likely to be labelled struggling or failing by Ofsted, the literature highlights the impact on students in terms of social inequalities, as schools narrow the curriculum and focus on subjects considered 'core' to assessment and league table positions. Gina's experience highlights the specific impact on the Shakespeare classroom, with her school's decision to remove GCSE English Literature in order to focus on



GCSE English Language, since the latter is more critical to performance measures. In terms of the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare, an under-reported consequence is the way in which working within such schools impacts on teacher workload and identity. Gina experienced not only a forced acceptance of a utilitarian, rather than a 'romantic', approach to education, but also increased pressures at A-Level since many of her students had missed out on a detailed study of Shakespeare at GCSE.

Dawn's experience offered a further variation on the literature since her school narrowed *teaching approaches* rather than content. What was noteworthy was that for all that the experience of CPDL was clearly positive for both Dawn and her school, and despite Dawn's engagement with evidence around the benefits of particular approaches, CPDL was not of itself enough to help the school withstand external pressures of teaching at KS4. Again, this echoed wider literature, cited in chapter two, which suggests greater challenges to the 'commitment and resilience of teachers in schools serving more disadvantaged communities' (Sammons *et al.*, 2007:699).

There are further striking parallels between the nature and influence of policy, media and academic 'debates'. Within the wider system these are characterised by a dogged determination to define education in terms of oppositional binaries such as theory versus practice, knowledge versus skills, and traditional versus progressive (Moore 2012, Alexander, 2008). These binaries are replicated in arguments about the teaching of Shakespeare, with traditional and progressive pedagogies rightly or wrongly associated with literary criticism and active and rehearsal-based methods respectively (McLuskie, 2009). My findings suggest that some teachers articulate further binaries between Shakespeare's plays as texts to be read versus texts to be performed. Yet the extent to which divisions between traditional and progressive pedagogies in particular reflect *actual practice* is less clear cut, again reflecting findings across both the wider education literature and



my data. Some have suggested that teachers now adopt terms such as ‘pragmatism’ as ‘identifying signs in the same way that “traditionalism” and “progressivism” were adopted as identifying signs in the 1970s and 1980s’ (Moore *et al.*, 2002:563). Certainly, within the data, with the exception of Gina, who appeared content to associate herself with the term ‘progressive’, and Sean who described himself as a ‘constructivist’, others in my sample either did not label themselves at all, or were keen to stress the value or need for a more inclusive, pragmatic approach.

What is clearer is that the Cartesian tradition of mind/body split not only dominates education (Winston, 2015) but is alive and kicking in the Shakespeare classroom as demonstrated through a clear hierarchy of teaching approaches (DCSF, 2008). This was evidenced within the data by changes in teaching in favour of literary criticism approaches as students moved through the key stages. Methods that are associated with drama and play are treated as inferior by some academics (Wilson, 1997; McLuskie, 2009) replicating wider suspicions of the educational value of play (Gove, 2012). In turn, such views have prompted some to be damning in their criticism of ‘Institutional prejudice against practical learning ... in favour of abstract reasoning’ (Lucas & Claxton, 2012:4), as referenced in chapter one. This has become so much part of the national psyche that students themselves, as indicated by the experiences of Ayesha and Fiona, are themselves suspicious of the educational value of drama, or active and rehearsal-based approaches. Olive described two key proponents of these approaches, Caldwell-Cook and Cicely Berry, as ‘innovative, but isolated’ (2015:54). What was interesting across the wider literature was that some approaches, particularly the use of film and other media (Coursen, 1997), and to a lesser extent context-based approaches (Olive, 2015), have gradually been introduced into the repertoire of the Shakespeare teacher. Yet both literature and data suggest absence of awareness (Dawn), or absence of appropriate knowledge,

confidence and skills (Monk *et al.*, 2011), alongside ‘scepticism’ and ‘reluctance’ (Irish, 2008b) around using active and rehearsal-based approaches, which may in part be explained by mistrust of the value of approaches based on play. This was particularly evident in the experiences of some teachers in my sample, such as Caro, Mary and Gina, who themselves emerged as isolated figures.

This is bound up with a national and indeed international dominance of certain, typically traditional or transmissive, pedagogies (Hattie & Yates, 2013). A consistent finding in the international literature is the degree of challenge for those teachers wanting to employ alternatives, as evidenced through research into active learning (for example, Niemi, 2002; O’Grady *et al.* 2014). The extra time taken for teachers and students to become familiar with different ways of working is particularly acute where there are changes to the role of the teacher and classroom management. The perceptions of risk, the resistance of students (particularly those already successful within the existing system), the challenge of colleagues, all make it harder for teachers to adopt alternatives such as active and rehearsal-based approaches (Irish, 2011). Both literature and data suggest that using literary criticism approaches is easier than active or rehearsal-based approaches *if* teachers, students, or entire schools are unfamiliar with the latter. Fiona’s experience demonstrated that it is not impossible to overcome these barriers, and she, along with others (for example cited in Winston, 2015) stated significant benefits of doing so. Yet the challenges remain clear.

Finally, awareness of and attitudes towards pedagogical theory and terminology appear both problematic and muddled at national level (Alexander, 2008), and within the teaching of Shakespeare. Ball asserted that pedagogy, assessment and curriculum are ‘the three message systems of the curriculum’ (2012:21) echoing a similar statement that the three, and the ‘interactions among them, lie at the heart of schooling’ (James & Pollard, 2011:283). Yet pedagogy seems to be the poorer cousin to curriculum and assessment; indeed, both literature and data

suggest it is often absent altogether, with some suggesting a damaging level of ignorance and confusion about pedagogy in England (Mortimore, 2014). Despite assertions that pedagogy as a term is ‘pretentious’ (Hayes, 2017: Paragraph 12) others identify a clear need for teachers to access a ‘pedagogical bank’ from which teachers can ‘contribute and from which they can draw’ (Bangs *et al.*, 2011:65). Certainly there were teachers in my sample who appeared to struggle to articulate their practice and its underlying purpose. A shared language, and common theoretical foundation, would undoubtedly have helped the likes of Gina, for example, to analyse and reflect on what worked, what did not, and why.

### **8.1.2 Assessment influences content, interpretation, repertoire and notions of effectiveness**

The impact of assessment is so well-documented (Moore, 1999; Mansell, 2007, 2011; *inter alia*) that, in many ways, it is difficult to assert this as a key finding. Yet the nature of influence on the Shakespeare classroom and the way in which it impacts on the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare is so profound that to overlook it would be disingenuous. English teachers appear particularly influenced by these pressures. Brishti’s reference to English teachers as ‘the most stressed ... in schools because of the pressure’ and Hugh’s description of how ‘the entire school rides on’ performance in English and Maths echoed references in the previous chapter to English as a ‘gateway’ subject for students (Isaacs, 2014) and the foundation for a school’s ‘success and failure’ (Wood, 2014:5). What emerged from this research was a strong sense that the pressures are increasing, and that the GCSE ‘machine’ no longer simply dominates years 10 and 11 but is reaching well into year 9. Hugh’s description of students studying *Macbeth* from year 9 onwards because it was the play they would be assessed on in year 11 was one particularly stark example. Dawn also suggested these influences were increasing, with greater focus on school performance and Ofsted judgements of data meaning ‘you have to drill down to exam technique’ sooner than had

previously been the case. Whilst Sean and Brishti reported that they could continue to teach the way they wanted to, not only did other examples indicate a narrowing of teaching approaches which suggested otherwise, but also their schools appeared to be in less challenging circumstances, again emphasising the additional pressures for schools serving disadvantaged communities.

Many in the literature have been particularly critical of the way in which assessment dictates not only content but the nature of interpretation within the Shakespeare classroom. This is at its clearest with continued perceptions amongst students, and indeed some of their teachers, that there is a 'right' answer, a 'correct' interpretation, as evidenced by Ayesha's experiences both of students and her former head of department, echoing claims made within the literature (Eaglestone, 2009). This is no doubt the result of years of exam questions which required students to adopt certain beliefs as a start point (Sinfield, 1994), assessing others' interpretations of Shakespeare rather than their own (Yandell & Franks, 2009).

Thus nominal government support for a repertoire of teaching approaches (DCSF, 2008; Olive, 2015) is at odds with assessment requirements which reflect the long-standing influence of literary criticism (Coles, 2013b). This is one of the greatest tensions that influence the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. A rare area of consensus to emerge from the literature focused on how 'an extensive repertoire of teaching models or styles is an essential pre-requisite of effective teaching' (Harris, 1998:179). The need for teachers to create a varied diet of teaching and learning opportunities was echoed by many (Campbell *et al.*, 2004; Alexander, 2008 *inter alia*), with some specifically stressing its importance within the teaching of Shakespeare (Quigley, 2014). Yet this recommendation is clearly undermined by the nature of assessment. Although my data suggested teachers were indeed embracing a wide repertoire of approaches at KS3, these narrowed to a stronger focus on literary criticism approaches as students

approached the high-stake assessments of GCSE and A-Level. Furthermore, there were sufficient references to past teaching, or the teaching of others, to suggest that the teachers in my sample were atypical, and that literary criticism approaches still dominate much of KS3 as well.

The literature repeatedly suggests wide-spread support for the inclusion of alternative approaches alongside literary criticism, with the call for the use of active and rehearsal-based approaches particularly strong (Hudson, 1954; Reynolds, 1991; Gibson, 1998; Stredder, 2004; *inter alia*). Yet attempts to broaden the teaching of Shakespeare have frequently failed or stalled because of the very nature of assessment. Reflecting on Gibson, Irish asked why did his work

not reach a critical mass – supported as it then was by many teachers, academics and policy makers? That spirit and soul of risk taking, the momentum of exploratory, experiential learning advocated by Gibson seems too often to have been crushed by the heavy machine of the testing regime and the accountability of league tables, which led to paranoid conservatism in the classroom (Irish, 2011:17-18).

Finally, assessment has come to define effectiveness. The likes of Biesta have long challenged notions of effectiveness, which he has argued need to be aligned first and foremost to educational goals and purposes (2009). Yet both the wider education system and the teaching of Shakespeare lack clarity of purpose. In their absence, effectiveness has become solely associated with performance measures articulated through tests and assessments. What emerged from the data were teachers who consistently reported being compromised in how they wanted to teach Shakespeare versus the exigencies of assessment. This echoes the conclusions of Hall *et al.* who themselves cited the already referenced work of Kress *et al.* (2005), by suggesting that

in a culture of accountability and blame, it becomes a high-risk strategy to adopt longer term goals for learning or define success differently; for example, in terms of the realisation of individual potential, rather than in examination results (2007:615).

Yet within the Shakespeare literature too often criticisms are made of approaches based solely on their ability to help students pass exams, despite consistent suggestions of their flawed nature (Sinfield, 1994; *inter alia*). Coles criticised the RSC on the basis that its approaches failed to neutralise ‘the toxic effects of the Key Stage 3 SATs test’ (2009:33), whilst Olive was similarly critical of the RSC for not ‘constructing’ Shakespeare in terms of the ‘knowledges and practices on which students will be assessed’ (2011a:255). Yet teachers in my sample, rightly or wrongly, had a multitude of purposes underpinning their teaching, some of which were part of far wider purposes than students simply passing exams. One clear example was Sean and his desire to open up possibilities for his students, to prepare them for life as future citizens and workers.

### **8.1.3 Heightened pressures and emotions exist due to the phenomenon of Shakespeare**

Whilst the majority of pressures described above characterise *all* teaching in the current socio-political climate, English teachers appear to experience heightened pressures due to the specifics of teaching *Shakespeare*. Shakespeare’s status, both as international icon, and the only mandated author within the English curriculum, has had a profound, and well-documented, impact on the Shakespeare classroom (Blocksidge, 2003; Olive, 2015). Part of the recent phenomenon of England’s relationship with Shakespeare has been a growing sense of disconnect between his work and large sections of English society (Coles, 2013a). Dawn’s assertion of a ‘cultural acceptability’ of disliking Shakespeare was

not only echoed by Fiona and Sean but reflected a number of studies in the literature (Wright, 2005; *inter alia*). The literature and my data highlight how most students expect Shakespeare to be boring, and confirmed how ‘deep seated’ (Galloway & Strand, 2010:25) these negative attitudes are, with seven out of nine teachers in my sample reporting students having pre-existing prejudicial attitudes towards Shakespeare.

Furthermore, my findings suggest that some teachers *expect* students to be bored. Brishti’s personal experience of finding Shakespeare boring, and her unquestioning assumption that ‘every kid finds it [Shakespeare] boring, has found it boring’ for the last four hundred years, may be unsurprising. Yet some studies highlight how student negativity is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning during the last century (Coles, 2013b). However, within the data there was little sense that attitudes were ever anything different. This is problematic, as it normalises perceptions of Shakespeare as difficult and boring, rather than questioning how the socio-political contexts of the twentieth century created the phenomenon of secondary school Shakespeare, rather than merely reflecting it. Thus another part of the phenomenon is that cultural negativity towards Shakespeare appears to be taken for granted, rather than questioned.

Indeed, the data suggest that a further feature of the phenomenon of school Shakespeare is that it prompts extreme emotions amongst not only students, but also parents and teachers, as indicated by Caro’s experiences, for example. Shakespeare appears both loved and loathed. Ayesha’s association of Shakespeare with ‘student baggage’ echoed suggestions in the literature of Shakespeare as ‘cultural baggage’ (Coles, 2013b; Ward, 1999), unsurprising given the complex, controversial, and unsettling nature of England’s relationship with its national poet. Collectively, these examples highlight the peculiar nature of the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare, reminding us that English teachers have to navigate their way through heightened pressures often before they have



even entered the classroom. As a result, teachers described starting ‘slowly’ so that students would not ‘become intimidated’ (Gina); breaking down text so that ‘it’s an easy bite’ for students (Mary); creating atmospheres that would promote positive engagement (Gina and Hugh); engaging in activities that will ‘ease’ students into Shakespeare (Ayesha). Thus a direct but under-researched consequence appears to be that teachers spend considerable curriculum time attempting to unpick or prevent culturally acquired negative attitudes.

#### **8.1.4 Attitudes and responses are varied, changeable and influential beyond the Shakespeare classroom**

Thus a clear finding is the prevalence of negative pre-existing *attitudes* towards Shakespeare. For some students these attitudes turn into equally negative *responses* to actual teaching, with some studies suggesting student hatred of Shakespeare regardless of teaching approaches employed (Coles, 2009). Such responses tend to relate to lack of comfort and familiarity with active and rehearsal-based approaches, which become increasingly marked as students get older, indicating that teachers are not the only ones drawn towards classroom interactions based on familiarity. Secondary school students, particularly those who have missed out on the types of experience at primary described by some studies (Winston & Partovi, 2017) can find it hard to adjust to new approaches. Aversion to risk (Irish, 2011; Monk *et al.*, 2011) and fear of appearing foolish (O’Brien *et al.*, 2006) are two of the key reasons cited in the literature as undermining secondary students’ willingness to engage in active and rehearsal-based approaches. Fiona, Gina, Ayesha, Dawn and Caro’s experiences all reflected some or all of the findings listed above with regards to student responses.



Yet negative responses to active and rehearsal-based approaches appear in the minority, across both literature and data. In fact, in the conclusion to Coles' own doctoral research, she reported that 'there appears to be a correlation between exposure to drama-based approaches and positive attitudes to Shakespeare' (2013b:257). This is a consistent finding across literature and data, adding to a now extensive body of research and evidence that suggests student experiences are more positive when active and rehearsal-based methods are included (Gibson, 1998; Strom, 2010; Banks, 2014; Strand in Winston, 2015; *inter alia*).

Furthermore, Strand's findings from the attitude to Shakespeare survey indicated statistically significant changes in attitudes not only to Shakespeare but also to school (*ibid*). The literature (Gibson, 1993; Winston, 2013; 2015) and data suggest that active and rehearsal-based approaches are particularly beneficial in helping students engage with Shakespeare's language, and overcoming the real or perceived barriers that the language presents. Caro's emphatic belief that students are more willing 'to struggle with the language' if they engage in active and rehearsal-based methods was echoed by Dawn.

What also emerged across both literature and data is that teachers' experiences appear considerably more positive when active and rehearsal-based approaches are used. The relish with which Sean described storytelling, or Dawn reported dramatising the storm in *The Tempest*, or Hugh talked of recreating the Globe were echoed throughout my findings, and the literature (for example, Stredder, 2004; Winston, 2015; RSC, 2016). These positive experiences spread beyond the classroom and can impact on whole communities, as evidenced in the report of a school which 'has transformed from one of the worst in the country to one of the best of its type' (Cassidy, 2016: Paragraph 2). Indeed a subtle, but nevertheless noteworthy, finding is that these approaches appear to change perceptions and expectations of student abilities. Reflecting on her school's increased results, which she attributed to engagement with the RSC's LPN, the headteacher

commented that ‘Teachers have said it has revolutionised their view of what children can do’ (Greig, cited in Cassidy, *ibid.*: Paragraph 24). This echoed Fiona’s comment about how engagement with the LPN had changed her perception of her student’s abilities, and observations linking RSC expectations with ‘Rancière’s notion about overcoming the gap of ignorance between students and teachers’ (Franks *et al.*, 2014:179).

### **8.1.5 Presence – and absence – of training, research and evidence impact on practice**

There are clear concerns about trainee teachers’ subject knowledge, both generally (Carter, 2015) and specifically relating to Shakespeare (Blake & Shortis, 2010). Multiple studies reported inconsistent access to CPDL (Education Select Committee, 2012; Teachers’ Professional Development Expert Group, 2016), and teachers’ limited engagement with research and evidence (Brown, 2013; Nelson & O’Beirne, 2014). My findings tended to support the literature, though awareness and use of research and evidence was more varied than some studies suggested. Gina referenced significant gaps in her subject knowledge of Shakespeare when entering the profession, Caro and Hugh observed it as a problem in colleagues, and Fiona and Sean expressed reservations based on their management and recruitment responsibilities. With the exception of Brishti, not one teacher referenced detailed training within ITE in how to teach Shakespeare. Ayesha mentioned limited opportunities and the remaining seven gave no indication of the influence of ITE on their teaching. Thus Gina’s experience, in particular, was characterised by absence as she started to teach Shakespeare, with only one unit at university, and a single session during ITE, to support her.

Whilst references to ITE were mostly consistent within the data, CPDL represented real extremes of presence or absence, both of which impacted on the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. At one extreme were Dawn, Fiona and

Caro who had engaged in extensive CPDL via the RSC or Shakespeare's Globe; at the other was Gina who, as indicated, had received almost no training in how to teach Shakespeare at any point in her career. Where training is present, of sufficient length of time and high quality, the literature (Cordingley & Bell, 2012) and my data collectively indicated how it plays a number of important roles. Most obviously it develops knowledge, confidence and skills; those in my sample who had experienced high quality training indicated how practice had improved as a result of these experiences. Furthermore, it was telling that Dawn, Fiona and Caro had an ability to articulate and reflect on their practice, which was sometimes missing from other accounts. Reflection is an essential characteristic of effective teaching (Pollard, 2002). Citing the wider literature, Thomson indicated that 'Teachers can do little if they do not have time to explore options, plan, trial and reflect ... or if they are not positioned as reflective (2010:29).

Training, particularly at post-graduate level, is more likely to increase engagement with research and evidence (Brown, 2013), corroborated by Caro, Fiona and Dawn's experiences. Finally, some in my sample suggested that training had influenced and changed their pre-existing beliefs. A number of studies within the literature had highlighted the tenaciousness of teaching-related beliefs that pre-date entering the profession (for example, Claxton, 1984; Britzman, 1991). There were instances within my data where it was evident that training could force a re-evaluation of these beliefs with explicit examples given about overcoming suspicions about the educational value of approaches involving drama and play.

### **8.1.6 Shakespeare is experienced locally**

Generalisations about England at a socio-political level can be misleading. There is no homogenised culture or society. Indeed, since this study took place, Brexit has demonstrated quite how deep divisions are. Thus national surveys of

teachers can overlook important local variations. London, in particular, seems to create a very different experience of Shakespeare, both personally and professionally. Whilst there are still debates about the cause, the 'London effect' emerged as a clear finding across literature (Hutchings, 2014; Weale, 2015) and my data. Teachers in my sample reported experiences of teaching in multicultural London, with parents and students positively predisposed towards education in general, which contrasted with reports of teaching in other parts of the country. Location again featured as a positive influence given London's offer of cultural opportunities. Local demographics played an important role, though sometimes in ways that were surprising. Ayesha's experiences of teaching Shakespeare in the affluent home counties versus inner-city London, with students attempting to lift themselves 'out of poverty', was the most obvious example. The 'laissez-faire' attitudes of students in the former were a stark contrast with the work ethic at the latter. This echoed findings within the literature that suggested significant differences between ethnic groups around attitudes to education, with low aspirations of white British students being particularly marked (Strand & Winston, 2008). These findings, along with Ayesha and Brishti's experiences, appear to suggest that cultural attitudes towards education are more influential than socio-economic factors. Thus students from predominantly white disadvantaged areas of England, such as Dawn and Gina's schools, appear to share attitudes to education, and indeed Shakespeare, with students from affluent home counties such as those at Caro's and Ayesha's first school. Economic disadvantage or class do not appear to be distinguishing features, undermining claims made by Bourdieu, referenced in chapter two, of 'bias in favour of the possessors of inherited cultural capital' (1990:xi).

Individual school cultures were also deeply influential, with those with leadership responsibilities emerging as critical in creating, or undermining, the

conditions in which experiences of teaching Shakespeare take place. Consciously or subconsciously school leaders influence expectations of students; support for training; the extent to which certain approaches or pedagogies are encouraged or discouraged; and the degree to which teachers and schools exercise choice and agency. Those in my sample who reported supportive school cultures, stemming from the SLT, appeared more confident and happier. By contrast, those who described unsupportive school cultures characterised their experiences of teaching Shakespeare in terms of isolation, frustration and sadness. The impact on actual practice was clear, and accounted for some of the variations in choice and use of particular approaches. Not only did this change the experiences of the teachers I interviewed, as evidenced by the contrasting narratives of Mary versus Fiona or Dawn, but also students' experiences of Shakespeare.

### **8.1.7 Shakespeare teaching is personal and interpretive**

In the confused, contested, under-theorised, under-supported, over-politicised backdrop against which the teaching of Shakespeare occurs, the personal emerges as perhaps the strongest influence on teaching and explains many variations in practice. In chapter one I referred to Banks' suggestion that the personal affects connections with and approaches to Shakespeare's plays: 'Who we are and our own personal life experiences affect the way we connect with and approach teaching any particular play' (2014:2). Coursen's suggestion that 'We teach what we enjoy' (1997:8) also rung true, although my findings suggest a modification: that we teach what we enjoy, *or what we enjoyed* as students ourselves. In an environment deeply influenced by absence (of consensus on purpose, and systematic training and support in how to teach Shakespeare available to *all* teachers), teachers in my sample taught in ways that were deeply steeped in their own personal experiences, identities and philosophies. Thus a personal passion for theatre translated into the teaching of Shakespeare

underpinned by opportunities to engage with live productions of Shakespeare's plays. Elsewhere, Shakespeare was linked to the opening up of possibilities, viewed as a tool for social mobility, for widening horizons, appearing to replicate a personal journey and relationship with Shakespeare. A strong teaching emphasis on post-colonialism could be traced back to personal identity and interests. An equally strong focus on language appeared to reflect a passion, and indeed ability, to connect with Shakespeare's plays that could be traced back to strong childhood experiences in the home. The inclusion of art and design type activities reflected school experiences, where they had been the only antidote to negative experiences. Teaching approaches mirrored those of an influential teacher, or with equal passion rejected childhood experiences of 'dry' teaching. Amongst all nine teachers in my sample, there was a strong sense of trajectory from childhood experiences, personal identity and philosophies through to current teaching practices.

Perhaps this is inevitable, and possibly desirable, since strong personal passions have been credited as a powerful indicator of teacher effectiveness (Hattie, 2008). Yet my findings clearly indicate that the nature and root of that passion warrants further investigation. Since passion stems from deeply personal experiences and beliefs, it is inevitably random. This is unavoidable; human experiences are necessarily unique and haphazard. There is, however, a cause for concern around the lack of awareness of, and reflection on, the influence of personal trajectories on professional practice. At the very least it creates significant variations which inevitably influence the next generation of students. At best, it creates a Shakespeare classroom underpinned by positive personal passions, experiences and agendas; at worst, it replicates negativity in terms of fears, attitudes and expectations which stem from the teacher's experiences rather than the students'. Brishti's expectation of student boredom was a prime example within my data. What the above also suggests is that teaching cannot

reflect absence. Thus the Shakespeare classroom is characterised by what is *present* in terms of each individual teacher's knowledge, passions and personal identities; it cannot reflect experiences, beliefs and passions that are absent.

Along with being deeply personal, the teaching of Shakespeare is also profoundly interpretive. At the heart of the Shakespeare classroom are three complex personal identities: the teacher, students and Shakespeare. One might imagine that the identity of Shakespeare, and the nature of his plays, would dominate. Yet the literature and data suggest that the characteristics of the individual teacher are just as influential, if not more so, since Shakespeare is always mediated by the *interpretation* of the individual teacher. Their identity, experience and beliefs influence not only the interpretation of Shakespeare's status and plays, but the interpretation of curriculum and assessment requirements; school expectations; student capabilities; and their own sense of efficacy and effectiveness. Both Shakespeare studies and hermeneutic phenomenology are clearly familiar with the nature of individual interpretations. Both remind us that all interpretations are ultimately subjective. As such teachers' personal interpretations merit interrogation, analysis, and reflection by all who have a vested interest in students' experiences and achievements in the Shakespeare classroom.

## **8.2 *Strengths of my research***

Whilst pre-existing studies into the teaching of Shakespeare have indicated the influences of socio-political contexts, there has been limited engagement in the professional context of pedagogy and approaches of the Shakespeare classroom (Olive, 2015). Furthermore, although there have been studies into the personal identity and life histories of teachers in general (Day, 2012), some of which focus specifically on English teachers (Goodwyn, 2002; 2010b), analysis focusing on the



Shakespeare teacher are almost non-existent, with some rare exceptions looking at race (Choudhury, 2007; Shah, 2013). Yet the data clearly indicate that the experience of teaching Shakespeare is heavily influenced by the socio-political, the professional *and* the personal; and that we have the best chance of understanding teaching practice if due consideration is given to all three contexts.

Recognition of this notion has been the key strength of this research.

Furthermore, the inclusion of highly unique, subjective, biased, complex and sometimes contradictory narratives – even when they are flawed in the telling or interpretation – adds greatly to our understanding of *how* Shakespeare is taught and *how* and *why* there are variations in practice. The process of focusing on the personal nature of the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare highlights gaps in existing studies that tend, by their very nature, to generalise rather than analyse individual cases. The personal has tended to be overlooked in the literature when looking specifically at the teaching of Shakespeare, yet my findings indicate it is as influential as the socio-political and professional contexts.

### ***8.3 Limitations of my research***

To ‘write up’ a qualitative study it is necessary to identify the story that can be told with the data – which is not always the same as finding the story that you would like to be able to tell (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006:410).

On commencing this research, the story I wanted to tell was one of clarity and strong, shared themes that would illuminate understanding of teaching practice in the Shakespeare classroom and provide clear recommendations for the future. In reality, the most significant finding is also the most serious limitation: that the teaching of Shakespeare is underpinned by extreme variations in experience,



practice and beliefs. It is messy, contradictory and idiosyncratic for the very reason that it is so deeply personal. I have consistently argued that generalisations from large scale studies, either about education itself or about English teachers specifically, mask important variations at local and personal levels. Yet qualitative research into a sample of only nine teachers clearly exposes only the tip of the iceberg in addressing limitations of previous studies.

A further limitation, common to all research, is that this study is necessarily bound by the time in which it took place. Interviewing occurred between May 2014 and January 2015. During that time there was a change of Education Minister; since then new curriculum changes have come into force, with greater emphasis on Shakespeare which would no doubt change the experiences of those I interviewed. Furthermore, England has had a change of government and has voted to leave the European Union. Many alluded to the Shakespearean nature of Brexit and the ensuing leadership challenge (for example, Mardell, 2016) whilst references to Brexit swiftly appeared in reviews of recent productions of Shakespeare's plays (for example, Cavendish, 2016). Many teachers and students may be finding their own new points of reference within Shakespeare's plays in response to world events, thus at least subtly changing the experience of teaching Shakespeare since I conducted my interviews. This highlights a third limitation. The questions I would ask now are different from the questions I thought to ask three years ago. Partly that is because of the changing landscape described above. Partly, however, it is that insights gained during data analysis, or revisiting the literature after interviews, often revealed new insights which emerged as more interesting or revealing than areas I initially considered significant. This is undoubtedly an inevitable characteristic of research, but it is a limitation all the same.

## 8.4 *Recommendations*

A call to move away from narrow, high-stakes accountability measures would be my strongest personal recommendation. Yet history suggests this is unlikely, at least in the foreseeable future. However, there are recommendations which, albeit still challenging, are perhaps more achievable, and have the potential to make considerable differences to the experiences of teachers and their students in the Shakespeare classroom. The first relates to the need for universally accessible, high quality training and support for English teachers with responsibility for teaching Shakespeare, both at the level of ITE and CPDL. This training needs to focus on development of knowledge, confidence and skills so that teachers are able to make choices from a wide repertoire of approaches and pedagogies, informed by a clearly articulated purpose and evidence about what is best to achieve that purpose. Furthermore, training needs to prompt reflection, both on practice but also on the impact of teachers' pre-existing beliefs and experiences on that practice. Given how varied these beliefs and practices are, ITE and CPDL providers should heed the advice of Cordingley and Bell about the need to 'personalise learning' through 'initial needs analysis of the participants' (2012:4).

The second recommendation relates to leaders: in a fractured education system they wield extensive influence in the school cultures that they create. Whilst leaders are undoubtedly aware of the pressures experienced by all teachers, they may be less familiar with the particular and peculiar pressures associated with the phenomenon of teaching Shakespeare. If teachers are to adopt the recommendations within the research for a repertoire of approaches and pedagogies, if they are to engage with and act on research and evidence, if they are to access high quality CPDL, then they need the support of leaders. This support is particularly important if teachers are working in schools where students, and possibly parents, react with the extremes of negative emotions

indicated in both literature and data. It is even more acute where teachers themselves, or their colleagues, share these emotions.

The third recommendation focuses on starting Shakespeare earlier. This was one of the key areas that teachers in my sample wanted to change: many of them believed that positive experiences of Shakespeare at primary would have a significant impact on the secondary classroom. The literature (RSC, 2016; Winston & Parvoti, 2017; *inter alia*) provides many examples of high levels of engagement and enjoyment of Shakespeare by younger students and the benefits in terms of overcoming the challenges presented by Shakespeare's language. Just as importantly, students who have become familiar with Shakespeare at an early age appear less likely to exhibit the fear and anxiety reported across the literature and the data. Not only do these emotions inhibit learning, my findings indicate that teachers spend valuable curriculum time devising activities to overcome these negative feelings, possibly to the detriment of actual learning.

Finally, policy makers, leaders, and CPDL providers need to be aware of the additional challenges of teaching Shakespeare in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Teachers in these schools need more support than their colleagues working within less challenging communities if they are to offer socially just and equitable content and teaching approaches.

## ***8.5 Implications for further research***

Whilst this research has inevitably considered the nature, role and influence of pedagogy, approaches, purpose and effectiveness in the Shakespeare classroom, these have not been the primary purpose of this study. Further research would be particularly beneficial in analysing what approaches and pedagogies are most effective set against specific, clearly defined purposes. In addition, more research into the role of leaders within the teaching of Shakespeare at secondary school is

needed since this is a significant gap in the literature. The experiences of BAME teachers are under-researched within Shakespeare studies. So too are the conditions of schools in the most challenging circumstances with regards to inequality of access to content and teaching approaches in the Shakespeare classroom. Both warrant more attention than they have currently received. Finally, all who care about Shakespeare within England's education system, or research or report on it, might usefully reflect on the phenomenon whereby we now take for granted pre-existing negative attitudes to Shakespeare and identify as surprising examples of positive response. The evidence-base, the literature and my data all suggest that 21<sup>st</sup> century students can and do find Shakespeare exciting, relevant and engaging, regardless of demographic or ability. Since a positive experience is clearly possible for some students, we should expect it for *all*. Collectively, we should turn our energies to analysing, supporting and changing practice where it currently fails to achieve this positive outcome, researching where it falters, rather than where it succeeds.

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# Appendices

## ***Appendix A: Acronyms***

AHRC – Arts and Humanities Research Council

AST – Advanced Skills Teacher

BAME – Black and Minority Ethnic

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

CPDL – Continuing Professional Development and Learning

DCSF – Department for Children, Schools and Families

DfE – Department for Education

DES – Department for Education and Science

EAL – English as an Additional Language

EEF - Education Endowment Fund

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

GTP – Graduate Teacher Programme

IoE – Institute of Education (London)

ITT – Initial Teacher Training

KS – Key Stage

LPN – the RSC's Learning and Performance Network

LATE – The London Association for the Teaching of English

NATE – National Association for the Teaching of English

NQT – Newly Qualified Teacher

OSOP – One sheet of paper

PGCE – Post Graduate Certificate of Education

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

RCT – Randomised Control Trial

RSC – Royal Shakespeare Company

SCITT – School-Centred Initial Teacher Training

SEN(D) – Special Educational Needs (and Disability)

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

TLRP – Teacher and Learning Research Programme

## ***Appendix B: Recruitment call out***

Maria Evans is a PhD student with significant prior experience of working with schools and arts organisations. Her PhD is looking at what influences the teaching of Shakespeare; her findings will be used to develop a greater understanding of Shakespeare in the classroom and what teachers need, or would like, to support their teaching.

Maria is looking for ten English teachers from secondary schools in England whom she can interview as part of this important piece of research. If you might be interested in being involved please contact Maria by 14 March on [maria.evans@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:maria.evans@warwick.ac.uk).

## ***Appendix C: Checklist of recruitment criteria***

<b>Purposive sampling ‘ideal’ of 10</b>	<b>Actual sample of 9</b>
Gender – 7 females; 3 males	7 females; 2 males
Ethnicity – 9 ‘White-British’; 1 BAME	6 ‘White-British’; 1 white American/British; 2 BAME
Age – 3 under 30; 5 30-49; 2 over 50	2 under 30; 4 aged 30-49; 3 over 50
Length of teaching practice – reasonable balance between less, and more, than 5 years	Less than 5 years – 3; more than 5 years - 6
Geography – reasonable spread across England	London: 2; home counties: 3; North West: 1; North East 3
Strong familiarity with RSC or other theatre organisations using active and rehearsal-based approaches – no more than 50%	Just under half (four) had little knowledge of RSC or other theatre organisations.

## ***Appendix D: Information and consent sheet***

### **What is the purpose of the research?**

The primary purpose of my research is to understand what influences English teachers when they come to teach Shakespeare.

### **What are the potential benefits of this research?**

It is hoped that this research will enhance understanding of the Shakespeare classroom and how English teachers might best be prepared for, and supported in, the teaching of Shakespeare.

### **Who is funding the research?**

The PhD is primarily funded through a bursary from the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council), with additional funding provided by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

### **Who has been approached to take part in this research?**

A call was put out via the National Association for the Teaching of English, and via the RSC's networks, for secondary teachers of English working within England. Approaches were also made through personal contacts and networks. It is hoped that ten teachers will be interviewed in total, with the sample representing a breadth of backgrounds and experiences.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time. You may also choose not to respond to any questions asked during the interview process.

### **What does taking part involve?**

I would like to interview participants twice, maybe three times, between May and December 2014. Each interview will take approximately one hour, although the first may take around 75 minutes to cover introductions, administrative details, and so on. Interviews will be face-to-face, phone or Skype. Face-to-face interviews will take place at a venue that best suits you and offers the greatest chance of quiet and privacy.

I will be recording the interviews, and will be asking for your consent on the attached consent form. These interviews will be anonymised. I will also be making some observational notes to put the interview into context.

### **What sorts of questions will I be asked?**

My primary aim is to understand your background and experiences as a teacher of Shakespeare. I will be asking for your personal experiences of Shakespeare, your training, and for your opinions about, and experiences of, teaching Shakespeare. Since everyone's background and experience is unique I am not looking for particular answers – I am only interested in *your* answers.

### **What will happen to results of the study?**

The results will form the major part of my PhD thesis. I also hope to present findings at conferences and through journal articles. I will provide you with an update on this after your final interview.

### **Contact for further information**

Maria Evans: [maria.evans@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:maria.evans@warwick.ac.uk)



## Consent form

Name of researcher: Maria Evans

**Please tick box**

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated May 2014 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without any consequences for me.

☐

I have been informed that the interviews I give will be recorded and I give my consent for these recordings to be made.

☐

I understand that all information I provide will be treated as confidential and will be anonymised.

☐

I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes from my interview in publications and presentations arising from this study.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

## ***Appendix E: Background questions asked or checked prior to interviews***

Answers are yes/no or not applicable/prefer not to answer

- What subject(s) do you teach?
- How long have you been teaching?
- Where in England are you based?
- How would you describe your school (single sex; mixed; 11-16; ;11-18; inner city, rural, suburban etc)?
- Are you familiar with the RSC's approaches to Shakespeare?
- Are you familiar with any other organisation's work with Shakespeare – for example, Shakespeare's Globe, National Theatre, Shakespeare Schools' Festival? If yes, please specify
- Please indicate your age range: a) under 30; b) 30-49; c) 50+; d) prefer not to say
- Have you taught at another school within the last five years? Please could you describe that school (eg single sex or mixed; 11-16 or 11-18; inner city, rural, suburban etc)
- Did you study English at: A-Level? Degree?
- Did you study drama/theatre studies at: GCSE? ; A-Level ?; degree?

- Can I ask about your teacher training – what route did you take? PGCE, GTP, Teach First, etc?
- Are you teaching at KS3? 4? 5?
- Do you teach/have you ever taught drama/theatre studies?
- Do you belong to a subject association and/or any subject networks?
- Do you use social media? Personally? Professionally or both?

## ***Appendix F: First interview schedule***

### **Section one: Personal experiences, training, support**

1. Can you describe your personal (ie non-teaching) experiences of Shakespeare, starting from your earliest memories as a child?
2. Can you take me back to your earliest experiences of teaching – what might I observe about you, the new English teacher?
3. And what about Shakespeare lessons specifically – to what extent were your experiences and feelings the same as, or different to, other English lessons you were teaching?
4. Can you tell me about any training or support you've received in terms of teaching Shakespeare's plays?

### **Section two: Teaching Shakespeare in the classroom**

1. Could you talk me through, in as much detail as you can, a typical Shakespeare lesson? If I was a fly on the wall what would I see, hear, observe, sense?
2. When you're planning lessons on Shakespeare's plays, what's uppermost in your mind?
3. Can you describe for me any particular teaching methods you use to teach Shakespeare's plays?
4. Could you outline for me differences – if any – in how you teach Shakespeare's plays across the key stages?

5. I'd like you to imagine three possible changes to teaching Shakespeare's plays in school. First, I'd like you to imagine that you're the Secretary of State for Education and have complete control over Shakespeare's plays in the curriculum: whether the plays are taught at all, in all schools, to all pupils of all abilities, across all three key stages of secondary/sixth form, how often, etc. What changes – if any – would you make?
6. And now you have complete control over how Shakespeare is assessed – if at all. What changes – if any – would you make?
7. Finally, you have complete freedom over your Shakespeare lessons within your particular school – the type of environment they take place in; length and frequency of lessons; number and profile of pupils, teaching methods, resources, etc. Again, what changes – if any – would you make?
8. If you could only change one of these (curriculum, assessment, or your personal lessons), what would it be?
9. Could you talk me through the difference(s) – if any – this would make to your teaching of Shakespeare's plays?

### **Section three: Supplementary questions if there's time**

1. If you could influence the training and support for new teachers of Shakespeare what would you prioritise?
2. If I came to your school and asked a handful of students, teachers and members of the SLT their views on Shakespeare, what sorts of responses do you think I might hear?

3. What impact, if any, does that have on you when you teach Shakespeare's plays?
4. Is there anything else you'd like to add about what influences your teaching of Shakespeare's plays?

## ***Appendix G: Second interview schedule***

### **First section: review first interview**

Clarify/discuss specific ideas/comments that emerged from first interview.

### **Second section: review personal experiences**

1. Some suggest that our personal early experiences of home, school and society – particularly our own teachers – are as influential on our teaching as any training or later experiences. Can I ask how you respond to this suggestion?
2. To what extent do you think you teach the way you were taught?
3. What CPD do you have access to as an English teacher?

### **Third section: Attitudes and pedagogy**

1. Can I probe a little further into departmental policies and approaches to the teaching of Shakespeare?
2. Can I ask about the range of Shakespeare plays studied? Who decides what plays will be studied?
3. Can I probe further into senior management attitudes and support for the teaching of Shakespeare?
4. To what extent is your teaching of Shakespeare similar – or different – to how you teach other areas of the English curriculum?

5. Thinking more generally, beyond your personal school, what do you think society expects of you as a teacher of English and Shakespeare?
6. How do you feel about those expectations?
7. There are some who suggest that the English – and indeed Shakespeare – classroom is the most political of all education environments. Can I ask what you make of this suggestion?
8. Much of my studying – both reading and interviews with other teachers – has highlighted differing views on the rights and wrongs of teaching Shakespeare within multicultural and/or working class classrooms. Can I ask what, if any, your views are on this matter?
9. If you had freedom over the curriculum would you make Shakespeare compulsory?
10. Can I ask, to what extent if at all, debates about pedagogy (eg progressive versus transmissive; subject knowledge versus skills) affect how you approach teaching?
11. Can I ask to what extent, if at all, you feel influenced by the likes of F.R. Leavis, Vygotsky, Dewey, or any other influential educators or English specialists?
12. Can I ask if there are any contemporary educators or English specialists you admire?
13. What role, if any, does research and evidence play when planning and delivering Shakespeare lessons?



**Fourth section: If time/relevant (some of these questions were explored in interview one)**

1. Can I ask, on a personal level, how knowledgeable do you feel about Shakespeare and his plays?
2. How would you respond to the statement: “Active or theatre approaches can only take learning so far before you have to move onto the more challenging aspects of literary analysis”?
3. If we took the curriculum and assessment as a given, what would you describe as next most influencing how you teach Shakespeare?
4. Could you summarise pupil behaviour at your school?
5. How, if at all, does pupil behaviour affect your teaching of Shakespeare's plays?
6. Some other interviewees have suggested that higher ability pupils struggle the most with drama approaches to Shakespeare. Can I ask if that's your experience?

## ***Appendix H: Third interview schedule***

1. I wondered if you would be happy to tell me how you vote?
2. Quite a few people have talked about an inspirational teacher, who influenced them, and I wondered if that's something that held true for you or not?
3. There was a newspaper article recently that suggested that teachers are more risk averse than people in other professions, and I wondered how you might respond to that, particularly in terms of taking risks with Shakespeare
4. There are some teachers who suggest that their gender influences how they teach. Has that ever been an issue for you?

## ***Appendix I: Sample transcript pages***

### **First two pages of first interview with Fiona**

*I wondered if you could describe for me your personal i.e. your non- professional teaching experiences of Shakespeare starting from your earliest memories of Shakespeare as a child or young person?*

I think my earliest memories of Shakespeare would probably be year 9 SATs tests and I remember doing *Macbeth*, and I remember studying these scenes, because it was back in the days of SATs when you would have set scenes that were studied, and I remember having absolutely no idea about what was going on in these scenes. I remember panicking, um, as somebody who, ... English at kind of ... my love of literature and my love of English kicked in very much at A-Level. I was always going to be a history teacher probably until starting my degree. But as a fairly conscientious student I remember panicking, I have no idea what is going on in these scenes. I enjoyed English, I was trying desperately hard but just being clueless regarding what was happening and even really struggling to make any links with *Macbeth's* thought processes of how this character has gone from being a loyal you know a loyal soldier in the opening scenes to then being you know killing the king and his downward descent, having absolutely no idea of what was going on. I then probably vaguely remember doing *Romeo and Juliet* at GCSE as a piece of coursework but again I think the Leonardo DiCaprio film had just come out, so I think because of that we spent an awful lot of time watching that, and probably my interest in Shakespeare kicked in a little bit more at A-Level. We studied *King Lear* and I really got into *King Lear* and we did it in-depth and it was very much the case of here's the scene, here's what every word means, now let's try to make some sense of it. But also quite seminar sessions and being able to discuss Shakespeare a little bit and probably developing an interest in Shakespeare at A-Level. And also I remember during

my A-Level studies I did performing arts as well and we went to West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds to see a performance of *A Comedy of Errors* and I absolutely fell in love with it and I think, yeah I remember almost being amazed that you could laugh at Shakespeare and that Shakespeare could still be funny and the humour within it was done so well and I think that probably ignited a bit of an interest, and then obviously going on at university and studying various Shakespeare modules and ... you know, finding out more about Shakespeare at that point. That would be my pre kind of professional experience of Shakespeare.

*So, can I clarify, the production of The Comedy of Errors, was that the first production you'd seen in the theatre?*

Umm, probably from what I can remember it would have been the third Shakespeare production I'd seen. Yeah. I had always enjoyed from about year 9 through GCSE I was starting to fall in love with theatre and enjoy going to see performances, but I'm fairly sure it was the first Shakespeare production that I'd seen live in the theatre.

*Okay, so can you sort of talk to me about your earliest experiences of teaching and what might I have seen in terms of the way you taught, how you taught six years ago?*

Ooooh, I think somebody who was incredibly professional in the classroom, um, and very little personality I think within a classroom, um, I think they're my kind of memories of what I was like. I think I did, you know, on a couple of occasions tried some more active approaches of getting kids to stand up out of their seats but it not really working, um, yeah, I think, just, it's strange isn't it, it's difficult to think back, but I think my overwhelming memories were of someone who was so very ultra professional in the classroom but no personality in the classroom.

*Can I ask you to unpick that for me, what does that mean for you, you say having no personality...?*

I think it means and stems from the idea of somebody who, I think you're so inevitably out of your depth with teacher training initially and also, also you're NQT year, your first year of training, that in order to tread water and in order to be successful what that meant was being in total control of everything that happened in the classroom and not, not really showing kids my personality within the classroom, and being not quite sure how to handle, I don't know, those moments of humour, that naturally arise in the classroom, having a very very professional, and a very, very disciplined attitude to those incidences when they occur.

## ***Appendix J: Sample notes from personal journal***

**13<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

Re-read first set of interviews from pilot study – realise I haven't asked questions that really help me understand *why*.

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

On about third iteration of interview questions. I'm far more aware now of the need to ask the right questions – I keep asking myself what do I *really* need to know, and what will I do with the answers? There are so many questions I could ask, and want to ask, but with only two interviews per teacher I must focus on what is essential. That presents me with another challenge – being focused and direct without being leading.

**21<sup>st</sup> October 2014**

Am concerned about my literature review. Am I subconsciously over-selecting articles and books that validate my epistemological views. More worryingly, am I overlooking articles and books that offer research and views counter to mine? I've decided I need to revisit what I've written and look out for bias.

**9<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Going through the process of adding codes and code categories to an NVivo equivalent computer analysis package is prompting reflection. Which of these codes are the most important in capturing the lived experience of teachers? Am I missing anything?

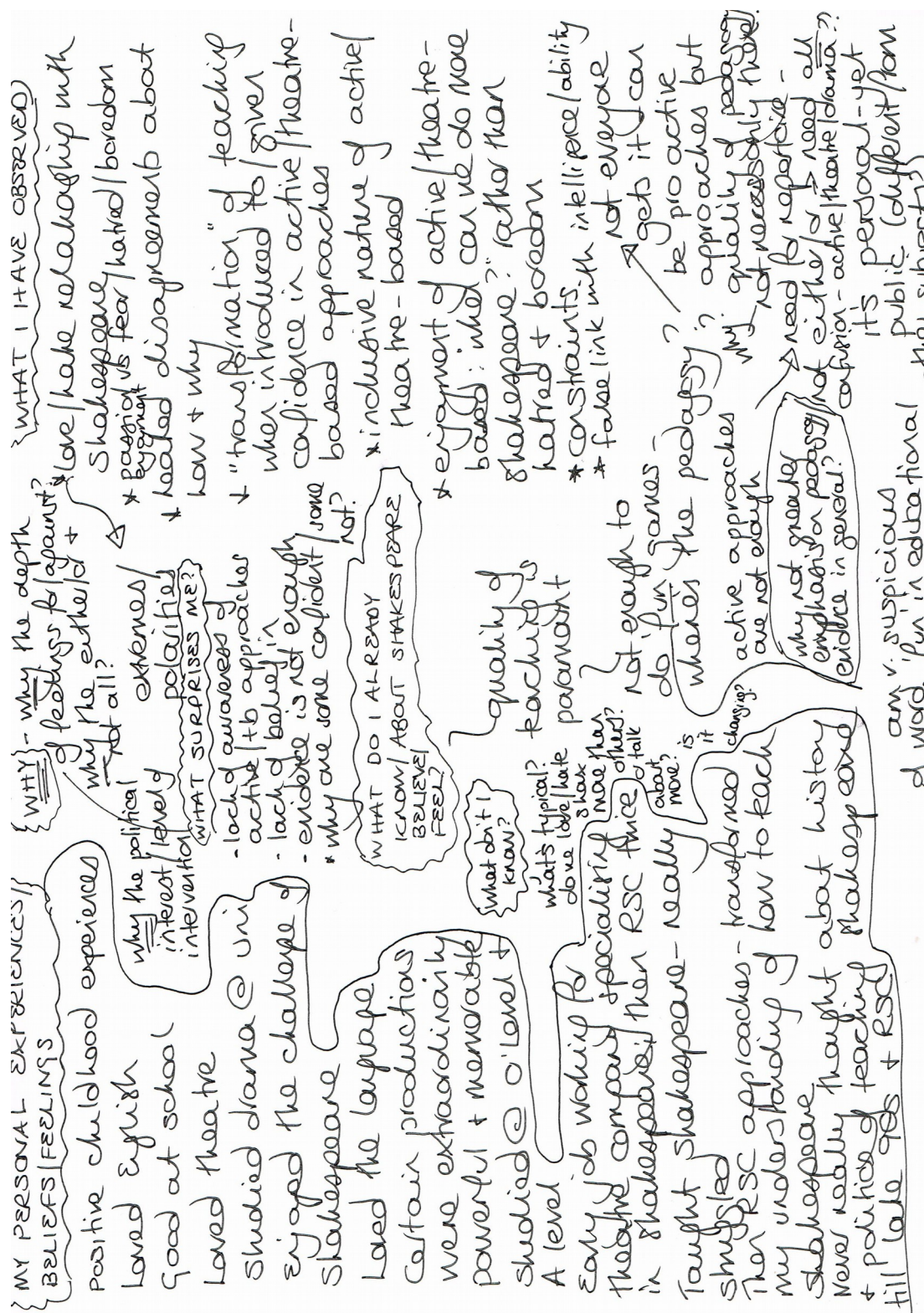
I've been struggling with a way to order a narrative that flows in a way that best captures the journey to the heart of the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare. Having established my three over-arching themes, which order should I both tackle and present them in. I have had a strong sense of the lived experience as a journey, with the teaching of Shakespeare in the classroom at the heart of it. Yet that doesn't quite work, because some of the code categories are ongoing: training, school contexts. So perhaps it's more like layers of experiences that a teacher takes with them every time they teach, and then reflect on the teaching of, Shakespeare. So there's experience/preparation; context; the classroom itself; and then how the teacher deals with, responds, reflects on all of these layered experiences. I am convinced that it is this last element that shapes the lived experience of teaching Shakespeare: the interplay between the context, which in so many ways is shared amongst English teachers; and how the individual teacher brings together all their experiences, beliefs, feelings in response to that context, which accounts for so many variations in actual practice.

## *Appendix K: Brishti word cloud*

assessment (13) away (10) bit (19) books (10) class (13) culture (11)  
different (11) drama (18) end (9) english (12) experience (19)  
girls (11) going (29) helpful (10) idea (21) important (16) key (15)  
kids (46) learn (11) level (17) lot (22) love (16) pause (10)  
people (14) play (49) present (10) probably (16) quite (20)  
really (61) remember (25) school (38)  
shakespeare (61) something (22)  
stage (11) start (14) study (13) teach (25) teacher (19) teenage (10)  
text (14) things (39) think (97) thought (17)  
understand (12) used (13) whole (16) work (17) write (15)  
yeah (27) year (35)



# Appendix L: 'Shakespeare brainstorm'





## Appendix M: Initial coding

2nd phase  
beliefs  
view as theatre  
short + ability  
approaches  
YP enthusiasm  
flexibility  
YP attitudes  
Beliefs / response  
approach / knowledge of class

1st phase  
enjoyed  
fun classroom  
not meant to have weak class  
nervous about a bit of film  
black boy, a white setting, "meant to" discussion most / lost inter-racial relationship of hasn't changed concerned really inter-ship attitudes engage breaking it get on don side bottom set

"official process"

they've just enjoyed the play more than anything else, that they'd had a bit of fun reading Shakespeare in a classroom, where he's not meant to be read. I always keep telling them "It's not meant to be in a classroom, it's meant to be on the stage; we're not meant to be doing this, it's just a completely artificial process". But I think they all do kind of enjoy it. I have a really weak Year 10 class and I know I've got to teach them Shakespeare, and a lot of us feel quite nervous about teaching this bottom set Shakespeare, because it's like "Oh my goodness, how are we going to get through all of this, with these students who are autistic, with learning difficulties, who just can't relate in the way that we'd expect most students to relate to text. So as a kind of creative writing stimulus I showed them the opening of the modern – it's O – this modern version of Othello, and they ... were really interested, because I've got one boy who's just absolutely obsessed with basketball, and he just sees this black boy in this white setting playing basketball, and he's just "I want to take the film, please let me take the film". And then we kind of talked a bit about the story and they were meant to do some creative writing, but it ended up just an hour long discussion about Othello, and they don't know the ending, but the thing that they were most interested in was this inter-racial relationship, and what that means in that society, and the fact that it hasn't really, massively changed now. And one of the boys x, was talking about the fact that his mum's Pakistani, and his dad's Jamaican, and everybody was like "that's not a right combination; that's so weird; how is that? And you're like this..." And then they became really concerned with the idea of Desdemona having Othello's children, and it was really interesting to see all of these kind of concerns and worries about missegregation?, being articulated in this "bottom set" Year 10 class. So in terms of their attitudes they do engage with these things, but I think it is that idea of breaking it down and how do you use your knowledge of that class, and what they are interested in to get them on your side, to engage with that text.

I'm just going to check,... Um, there are some things I want to come back on that you've mentioned, but I just want to carry on with this bit about attitudes at the moment. What about staff attitudes? How many teachers are there in the English department?

About 18 of us, it's quite a large department, because there are about 2000 in the school.

And what's the, is there a sort of consensual approach to Shakespeare, or does everyone come with their own...

Everyone kind of does their own thing. So there are resources, like sheets, and ideas, and activities that you might share, but we all kind of respect each other as kind of being autonomous and most people within the department have enough experience to kind of just go off and do their own thing. And I think it's kind of nice that way, and there are a few people in the department who feel quite passionately about Shakespeare and Shakespeare teaching. I've got a colleague down the corridor who absolutely loves teaching her Shakespeare, and another girl within the department as well. So we share ideas, but there's no kind of sense that this is the right way to teach Shakespeare. And we all kind of understand we've all got different classes, difference personalities, and they

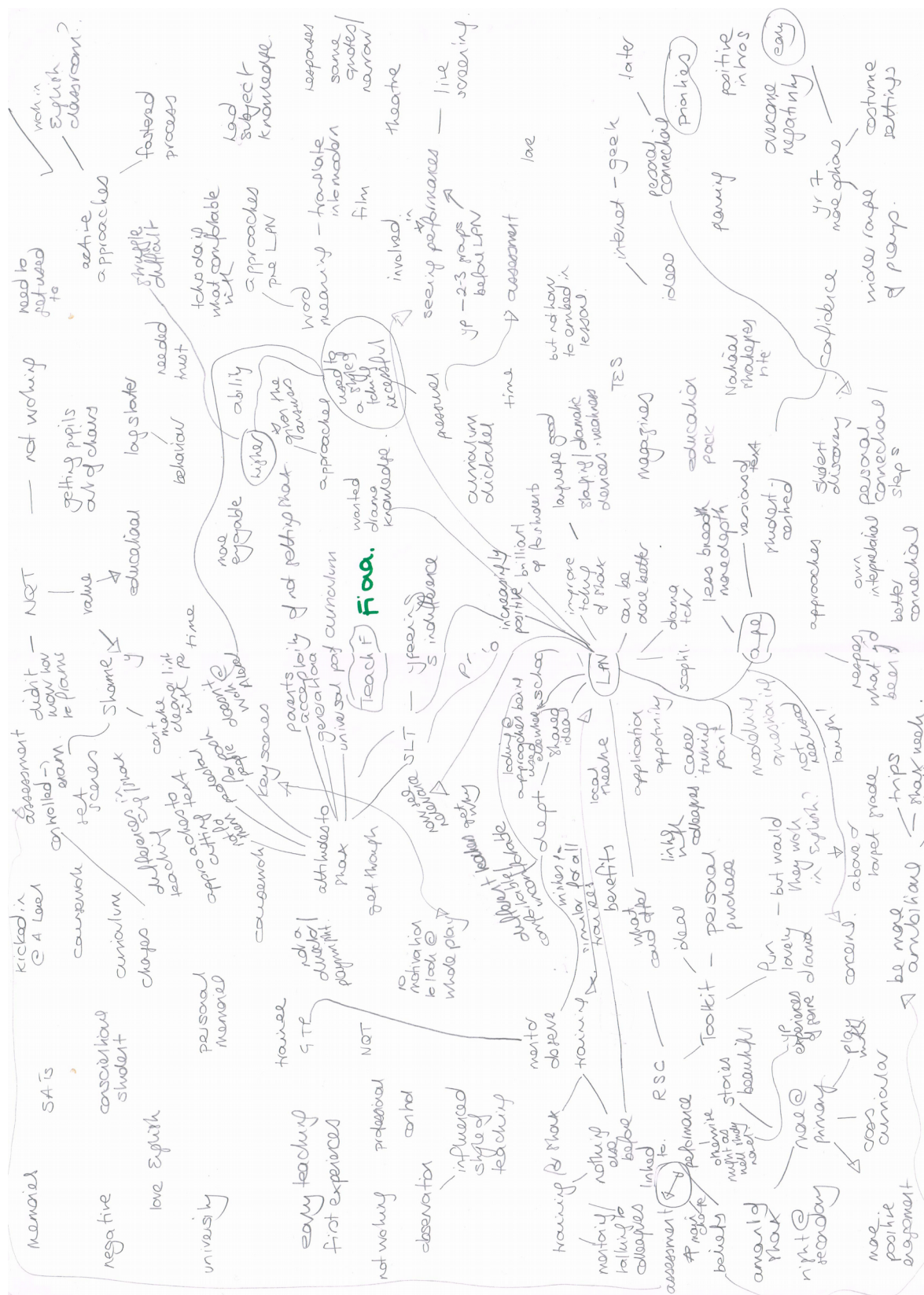
dept policy  
share resources + ideas  
relationships  
beliefs  
few requests  
not majority  
dig deeper

teachers do own thing  
respect each other  
few ppl passionate  
we share ideas  
no right way.

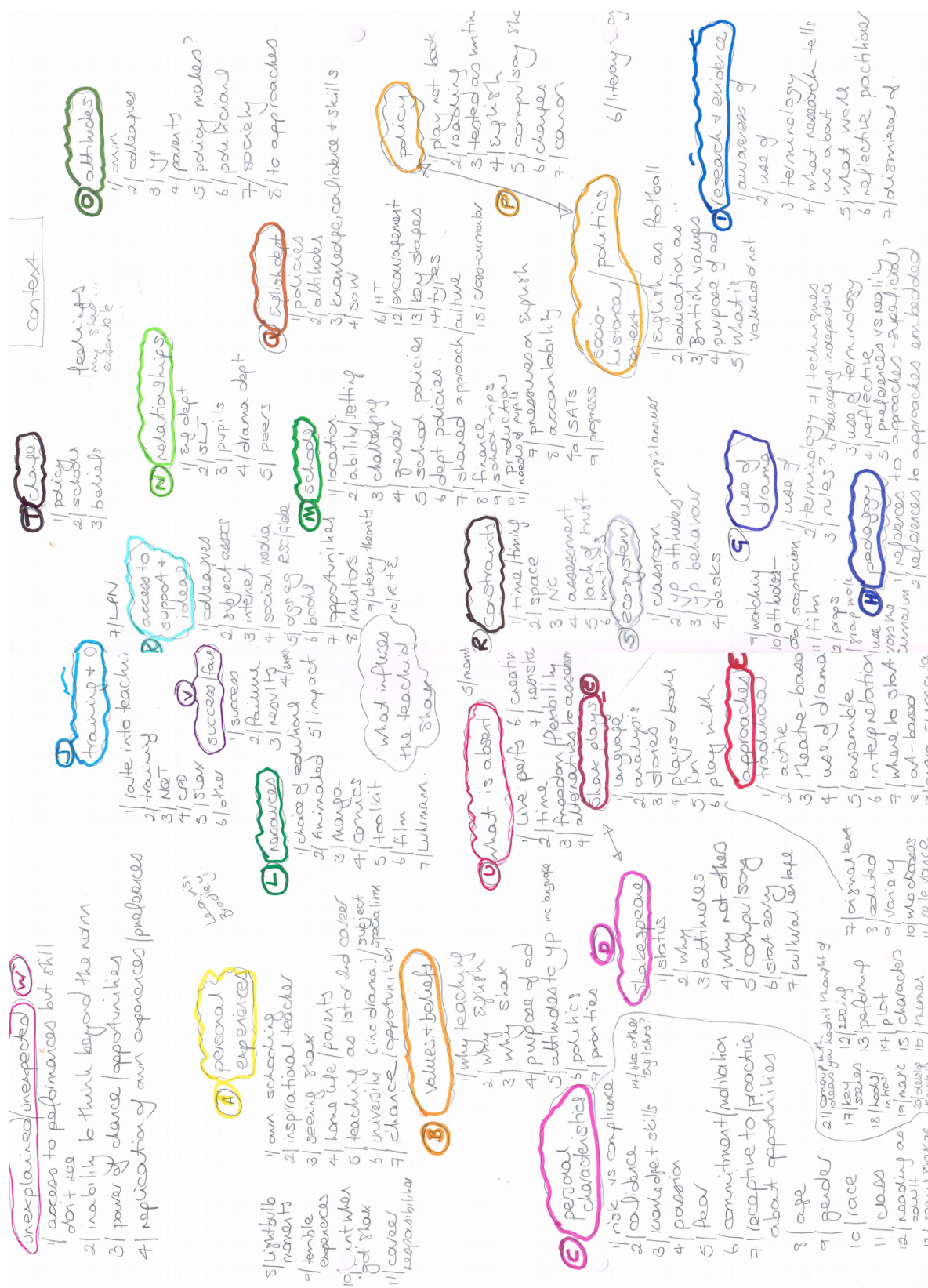
First interview with teacher | Jan 2015 page 6



# Appendix N: Sample OSOP (one sheet of paper)



## ***Appendix O: Master OSOP***



## ***Appendix P: Sample RQDA coding***

**Experiences of training, sample of responses; created by [RQDA](#) at 2015-12-02**

**Ayesha [ 7736: 8354]**

I don't think we had any formal training to do with Shakespeare. We watched videos of Shakespeare being taught. I remember we had a session where we taught - watched a video of some students looking at *Richard III*, kind of persuasive speech, and they had to perform their own kind of role play about persuasiveness. And that was quite powerful. But there wasn't any formal kind of "this is how you must teach Shakespeare". Or "this is what you must do" just kind of suggestions of drama activities and what you might do with any class, kind of general activities but not specific to the Bard or anything.

**Brishti1 [36384:36459]**

Even when I went to my placement school I never really had any drama to do.

**Caro1 [23428:24514]**

I really, really needed to do something that focused my teaching more, so I did a, my Masters is called Creative Arts in the Classroom but I did the two English modules and the two creativity modules, so two modules at the Globe and two modules at Kings that were English in the classroom, English-based and that really focused my teaching and really influenced my teaching of English generally. And then the Globe experience really focused me on what would be nice teaching Shakespeare as opposed to what is possible, because that gets beaten out of you as soon as you get back to school (laughter).

**Fiona1 [13768:14230]**

Other than mentoring, you know, kind of briefly talking about it with other colleagues, probably not actually. I think the only thing that I can think of is talking about, talking with other colleagues, those informal, you know ad hoc conversations that you have on the, in the staffroom, or in the departmental office, but other than that absolutely nothing.

**Gina1 [45734:45865]**

We only had one session on Shakespeare, which I think, and it was an area that I was concerned about in terms of my own abilities.

**Sean2 [22617:22943]**

I was lucky enough to have a fantastic day back in I don't know whether it was 92 or 93, about that time, with Rex Gibson at Cambridge, and that was just fascinating, his approach to teaching Shakespeare which was "get off your arse", and run around the room with the kids, and explore it as a drama text, that was fantastic.